

Fishing for Good Nutrition

How Backyard Fish Farming Is Improving Diets in Bangladesh

By SPRING/Bangladesh



Photo : SPRING/Bangladesh

Farmer nutrition school participants practice throwing a net into the fish pond in Babuganj. The fish they catch will provide critical nutrients to their families.

“I never ate mola fish regularly. I did not truly understand that consuming fish was so important for nutrition until recently. We ensure the baby gets enough of it now. My husband and I also have fish from time to time.”

—Nazma, an FNS student from Barisal

Fish are a major component of the Bangladeshi diet, providing excellent nutritional benefits, especially for pregnant and lactating women and young children. By teaching Bangladeshi families to raise fish in their own backyards, farmer nutrition schools (FNS) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development are making the most of this valuable natural resource.

Administered by the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project, FNS training sessions include pond fish culture modules on topics such as preparing the pond for fish stocking, fish feed production, stocking the pond with juvenile fish (known as fingerlings), and regular fish harvesting. They also provide information on the importance of animal source food and the nutritional content of fish. The schools promote nutrient-dense small indigenous fish species, since these are easy to keep in a small pond and contain a wide array of micronutrients such as iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin A, vitamin B12, fatty acids, and protein.

Nazma, an FNS student from Barisal’s Babuganj upazila, first learned about fish farming in 2014. She says, “I learned how to prepare the pond for fish stocking and to ensure that there is enough fish feed throughout the production period. The topics on fingerlings stocking helped me a lot, too. I now know what the characteristics of healthy fingerlings are and where to find them.”

Since their founding in 2012, farmer nutrition schools have helped popularize the mola fish, in particular. Participants are now aware of its positive impact on nutrition and health. Nazma adds, “I never ate mola fish regularly. I did not truly understand that consuming fish was so important for nutrition until recently. We ensure the baby gets enough of it now. My husband and I also have fish from time to time.”

Women like Nazma are not the only family members raising fish. Wives are teaching what they have learned to their husbands. An FNS member from Bakerganj says, "My husband can actually give you more information about our fish culture since he has been equally involved in this. He has been assisting and encouraging me at every step and I am grateful for that."

In addition to learning about fish farming, FNS participants are taught about why a diverse diet that includes animal source foods like fish can help ensure better nutrition for their families. They are also taught about the introduction of complementary foods like fish for children under two years of age.

Lessons on fish culture—coupled with FNS teachings on homestead gardening, dietary diversity, infant and young child nutrition, and hygiene—are transforming the way communities think about food consumption and nutrition in Bangladesh.

With the knowledge and training provided by the FNS program, families reap the benefits from resources available in their own backyards.

More than 126,000 women have benefited from 6,421 SPRING-implemented farmer nutrition schools across 40 *upazilas* in Barisal and Khulna since May 2012. SPRING/Bangladesh facilitates social and behavior change to prevent stunting in young children by focusing on nutrition during the critical "1,000 days" from conception through the first two years of life.



Photo : SPRING/Bangladesh

Nazma's husband shows off the catol fish he just caught from the pond.



Photo : SPRING/Bangladesh

After receiving FNS training, Nazma knows how to harvest mola fish.

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