

Cage Fish Farming in India and Bangladesh: *Prospects for Bilateral Cooperation*

This Policy Brief analyses the evidence regarding the potentials of enclosed fish culture amongst the local communities of India (particularly the Assam region) and Bangladesh through its cross-border trade prospects. It proposes recommendations to enhance the arena's opportunities and promote the empowerment of local indigenous communities, including youth and women.

Background

The Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna (GBM) are transboundary river system that holds cultural, religious, economic, and political importance for Bangladesh and India. Communities residing near these rivers were dependent on economic activities, including fisheries, trade, and tourism. It is thus vital to revive these rivers for the social development of these communities.

Furthermore, the production and cross-border trade of fish through the transboundary rivers of India and Bangladesh offer the potential to increase bilateral economic cooperation and improve the livelihood opportunities of local communities.

In this context, CUTS International has conducted research on the prospects of cage

fish farming production and supply chain in India and Bangladesh under a regional project entitled "Trans-boundary Rivers of South Asia" (TROSA) as a part of its Year-4 activities. The project is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and managed by Oxfam. The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce the poverty of marginalised and vulnerable river basin communities through increased access to and control over water resources.

The conducted study explored the production and trade prospects of cage fish farming in the Assam region (Guwahati, Koliabor, and Abhyapuri) and tapped the potentials of the emerging arena to make the benefits accessible to the participating communities. It has adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches to reach its conclusions.



Discourse around Cage Fish Farming

• India

The Southern states of India are already utilising the cage farming technique for better socio-economic profits. The eastern and northeastern states have started the practice in their states too. At present, cage culture in the country is restricted to non-flowing water bodies and dams/beels, despite unutilised secondary channels in several vast river systems. Furthermore, there is a minimal effort by agencies/individual fishers to augment the fish population of these rivers, followed by planned fish extraction.

• Bangladesh

Cage culture was first introduced to Bangladesh in the late 1970s. At present, the cage fish farmers face certain hurdles, such as construction costs, thefts, unaffordable cash requirements for supplementary feed, and incompatibility between the immediate need from earning daily income among the poorest and the seasonal income that cage culture can offer.

However, despite these efforts and projects, the practice is yet to be popularised in all strategic locations in the country. Additionally, the interventions and the funding aids hardly reached the poor or the local stakeholders.

Recommendations

The key recommendations for cage fish farming in India and Bangladesh include:

- Cage fish farmers require human capital and skills, social capital, financial capital, and a vital operating environment, including support infrastructure, facilities, and access to markets.
- Binding and long-term secure access rights are critical for cage fish farmers to gain access to water bodies or ponds through lease or other access arrangements for fish farming, as without these rights, these farmers are vulnerable.
- The initiatives and strategies need to recognise specific and prevalent features of poverty among the intended beneficiaries.
- The existing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) should be encouraged to take fishery as a key income by providing financial support to the riverine communities. The sector holds immense potential in generating employment for women.
- Cages should be placed in such a planned manner that will ensure biodiversity to combat the environmental concerns in this sector.
- Establishing resilient market linkages and adopting new and innovative production technologies are required to manage and utilise water resources efficiently.

Supported by

