

PROMOTING ORNAMENTAL FISH CULTURE THROUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: SOME INSIGHTS

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With the increasing standard of living and changing life styles in India, aquarium fish keeping has become a hobby for many urban people. In recent years, demand for ornamental fish has surged in national and international markets. This has offered good opportunities for ornamental fish production and opened up new avenues for the economic betterment of rural women.

With these opportunities in mind, the National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture, Bhubaneswar, as a part of its activities to bring technological empowerment to rural women, undertook the transfer of ornamental fish production technology to sixty (60) women from two blocks (Nimapara and Baliana of Puri and Khurda districts) of Orissa State, India. Looking at the high costs involved in start-up, low cost and locally available earthen tanks of 60-70 l capacity were used initially for culture of ornamental fishes in place of more expensive cement tanks. This not only saved costs but also was motivated young educated girls and women. Participating women were given training in different aspects such as brood stock management, larval care, collection and production of natural feeds like tubifex, zooplankton, feed and water management and management of production units. In the process, 15 production units (each unit with 5-6 earthen tanks) were developed in different localities. Even though production units could be established successfully, women faced severe problems in marketing ornamental fishes to wholesalers at Bhubaneswar, located 30-40 km away from the place of production.

Different models were used to facilitate marketing of ornamental fishes. In the first instance, women were given exposure and orientation to different market places, marketing procedures and pricing mechanisms. They also interacted directly with middlemen to become familiar with marketing practices. In this way, women entrepreneurs were linked to the market. For the first few months, women producers successfully marketed their fishes in Bhubaneswar and the system worked well. But, subsequently, the enterprises failed. While women had their own problems of transporting fishes over long distance 2-3 times a month, they had also to face exploitation by traders. Apart from the low price they obtained and delayed payment by traders, women were, on several occasions, forced to take back their consignments.

In a second model, a network of ornamental fish production units in a locality was made and an educated youth was identified who, apart from supervising the units, had the responsibility of procuring and selling the fishes. He was given the necessary orientation and training to take care of the units. At the same time he was given training in aquarium preparation. Here the strategy was to popularize ornamental fishes in semi-urban areas and create new markets. The model yielded good results. Not only has the sale of aquariums gone up in the locality but also the production and ornamental fishes has also steadily increased. As a result, the women-managed production units could generate an additional income of Rs 500 – Rs 1,000/- per month. The arrangement not only made the units sustainable but also created a multiplier effects in the area through expansion of existing units and establishment of more units in neighbouring areas.

Thus the experience amply demonstrated that women could contribute to the growth and development of fishery sector, but it required good planning of interventions, taking into account the women's interactions along the whole supply chain.