

Week 1: Fishing brings new life to farmers in Bangladesh



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SPRAGUE

Farid Pathang, 43 and his family are from the village of Samuniapara in Mymensingh, Bangladesh. "Before we received support from Caritas life was very difficult. It was hard to survive," said Farid.

Families struggled to grow enough food to eat. They lived a subsistence existence and suffered from malnutrition. When desperate they borrowed from moneylenders at high interest rates.

In 1991, Caritas came to Samuniapara offering assistance to the villagers. Caritas listened to the villagers concerns and helped them set goals for the future. They helped form a village committee and provided training and support to achieve these goals.

Since Farid and his family joined the program in 1998 they have achieved a great deal. Farid's wife, Alpona, 42 is a member of the women's savings group. Women in the group share knowledge and learnings with their husbands and families as most men work as labourers during the day to provide income for the family and are not able to attend meetings.

The group has taught the village women to save money and each family represented on the committee now saves 10 thaka (approx twenty cents) each week enabling them to have access to an interest free loan from Caritas when they need one.

The group has provided the village women with training on how to establish a fish pond and vegetable garden. Today villagers are encouraged to grow a variety of vegetables all year round. Farid and his family have planted a vegetable garden on the edge of their fish pond where they grow tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes and green chillies.

This is a vast improvement from the past when they grew one crop in winter and had to buy vegetables for the remainder of the year. Excess vegetables and fish are now sold at market for income which is used to repay their loan and pay for any household and health related expenses. With fresh vegetables and protein from their home grown fish, Farid and his family have more

energy and better health. They have planted trees near the fish pond including mango, guava, beetle nut and olive trees and some timber trees which they will sell for income in the future.

Farid and Alpona have one son, Homar, 9, who attends school and in his spare time works with his parents tending to vegetables, weeding the rice crop, feeding the fingerlings in the fish pond and minding the cows in the field.

Farid and Alpona have taken three loans with Caritas. In 2003 they borrowed 1200 thaka (approx \$23) from the savings group to buy food for their baby fish (in their newly dug fish pond) and in 2004 they borrowed 1500 thaka (approx \$29) to re-stock their pond with fish and buy more fish food.

In 2005 they borrowed 6000 thaka (approx \$115) to buy a cow in partnership with their neighbours. They use the cow manure to fertilise the green algae in the fish pond which provides extra food for the fish, cutting down on cost of purchasing fish food. The cow manure is used to fertilise vegetables and crops and the cow milk is sold at market for additional income.

Farid is happy that his family no longer needs to buy food from the market and is proud that he can help relatives on occasions by sharing fish and vegetables with them. Like many parents, Farid and Alpona hope that their son Homar will continue his schooling so he will have a better life.

Your donation to Project Compassion will allow communities like Farid's to gain food security and become self-reliant, enabling them to look forward to the future with hope.