



Fact Sheet

A NEW CONFIDENCE

People of Bangladesh between the ages of 15-25 make up approximately 17% of the total population. These young people are the countries engine of the future and have always been a factor in political and social reform. Yet their role in the economic sector is not as bright since 37.6% of the youth are either unemployed or underemployed¹. The unemployment rate is even higher in rural areas. Lack of opportunity and skills are considered to be the main reasons for this high level of unemployment.



MACH APPROACH

MACH adopted a policy of engaging youth meaningfully to help conserve and manage wetland resources and promote reforestation of river banks and wetland edges. Among the more than 5,000 members in the Resource Users Groups, 18% are young people between the ages of 15-25.

About 50% of the young members of the resource user groups have received skill development training in poultry rearing, fish culture, vegetable cultivation, cow rearing and fattening, vocational training and vehicle driving. 80% of the young members totaling more than 720 have received loans to start small businesses making use of existing or newly acquired skills.

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There are more than 150 youths in the Resource Management Organizations (RMO) established by MACH and many of these are involved in managing large wetland areas. Young members of the RMOs and local clubs voluntarily work as members of the water quality monitoring group in one of the project sites where significant industrial pollution threatens the fishery. These youths regularly monitor twenty field locations in the Turag river and Mokesh Beel area using water testing and sampling equipment.

Young RMO members have motivated and encouraged other youths from the community to take part in tree planting which helps natural resource conservation, creates more diverse habitat for birds and other animals, and provides financial returns to the area through future selective harvest of trees.

¹ Source: BBS Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003

RESPONSE



"If I didn't receive poultry training I would have ended up as a fisherman like most of the people of my area. Fishermen here earn a maximum of taka two hundred a day working ten to twelve hours. This is not even ensured every day. Now I make ten times more from my poultry farm."- Mohammad Belal Hossein, member, Resource Users Group (RUG), Shreemongol.

New income sources have taken the pressure off the traditional and low paid professions such as fishing. The standard of living for these fishing families has risen with family members taking part in more profitable income generation activities. These fishers have become more health conscious and their children now attend school.

"I could never get near the government officials of the Upazila before becoming a member of the MACH RUG. Now I have regular meetings with them and talk to them about various problems. The officials are much more supportive than before." - Mohammad Rofiqul Islam, Secretary, Federation of Resource Users Group, Kaliakoir.

Leadership training has raised the voice of some of the young members of MACH Resource Users Group. They are taking up more responsibilities with young member's involvement in the decision making process helping to increase the effectiveness of the organizations activities.

Young people who are involved as water quality monitors measuring the level of dissolved oxygen (DO) in the Turag River and Mokesh Beel are thrilled and empowered to have acquired new technical skills and the opportunity to contribute evidence in support of their community based resource management organizations' efforts to reduce industrial pollution that is seriously affecting the fisheries and human lives. The youth club engaged in conservation projects such as tree planting has gained an exciting opportunity to take responsibility for their own environment and to generate income for the club to be able to support their own village library.

These trained and employed youth have seen hope come out of their efforts and they have created interest within others to support wetland conservation and improvements for their families.



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