

SMALL STORIES OF SUCCESS



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The Bangladesh Aquaculture and Nutrition Activity (BAA), a project managed by WorldFish and funded by USAID, tries to enrich the lives of aquaculture actors in the Southern belt of Bangladesh through a variety of programs and services. As a subgrantee of the project, Bank Asia with its implementing partner in the field - **The Right Kind** have built rapport with input retailers in various localities across Barisal, Satkhira and Jashore to identify fish farmers for loan provision.

The success of this project is interesting, as inherently, it dealt with bringing about a widespread behavioral change in its incumbents. First of all, a new system came into place whereby local retailers, upon the merit of their social standing and business acumen, were recommending farmers for loans and acting as their 'guarantors' to the bank. Next, farmers and retailers, once comfortable acting within an informal economy, were being taught to familiarize themselves with the digital payment solutions introduced by Bank Asia. 445 farmers benefited from loans through this 18 months long project - many whose lives were turned around completely after floods, cyclones and the pandemic crushed them.

Here are some of the success stories that highlight how different market actors - farmers, input retailers and Bank Asia agents were integrated in the project design, and how each of them benefitted from the intervention.

Shahadath Hossain

Farmer

Young Shahadath Hossain had a rich life ahead of him when he left his village home in Barisal for Dhaka with his elder brother to earn money to send back home to his family. Unfortunately, due to an accident in a jute mill in 2016, young Shahadath had to amputate his right arm. But Shahadath did not let this misfortune interfere with his life. Upon return, he soon began farming fish at his village in Chandipur of Jagua union in Barisal Sadar upazilla, in a modest 45 decimal pond with a small vegetable patch along the banks. As the days passed by, he tended to his pond and dreamed of making a humble profit. Sadly, disaster struck once more in the form of floods and cyclones, washing away all of Shahadath's hard work. Dismayed but not discouraged, Shahadath sought the help of a fisheries officer who got in touch with **The Right Kind** team members and the input retailers they selected under the project. Through the reference of one such input retailer, Hawladar Poultry Feed, Shahadath's loan file for BDT 40,000 was soon approved by Bank Asia.



Overjoyed, Shahadath vigorously set about tending to his newly stocked pond, frequenting the District Fisheries Office and meeting **The Right Kind** expert to learn about how best to obtain a bountiful harvest on his investment. Shahadath, who had previously taken a loan of Tk 20,000 from another commercial bank to be paid back in 46 installments of Tk 500 weekly, was very content with the loan from Bank Asia as he had the option to pay back the entire loan at one go after he harvested his fish. He told **The Right Kind**, "I will never forget how you helped me during a difficult time in my life. With the money from this harvest, I will increase the number of farms I have. Currently my father and brother are helping me, but soon I can employ the help of many more from my village!"

Tarequul Islam Aqua-Input Retailer

Gazi Motsha Khamar is an aqua input retail store in Sadar Upazila of Jashore district. Its proprietor is 49 years old Tarequul Islam, who has been running this business for the last 6 years. A retailer of considerable repute. Tarequul was scouted by **The Right Kind** field team who explained Bank Asia's accessible loan program to 100 retailers like him. Excited to get underway, Tarequul soon received training from **The Right Kind**, and a smartphone and biometric device from Bank Asia to facilitate retail sales to fish farmers who would receive digital loans. He gathered 6 farmers to apply for loans under his guarantee, all of whom were approved. He now hopes to tag more than 50 of his regular customer-farmers with Bank Asia. He feels the demand for bank loans would be higher if more farmers are trained on best aquaculture practices.



Many in the region, he shared, stock fish without maintaining proper density, nor do they buy commercial feed due to financial limitations. A loan as well as training to these fish farmers would help them have a better yield and better income. It is estimated that through this project alone, Tarequul has done business of over **BDT 2,00,000**.

Shemul Kumar Das Bank Asia Agent

Mr. Shemul Kumar Das manned a small Bank Asia agent banking booth in Dhandia bazar of Kolaroa Upazila in Satkhira. Having completed his Master's in Economics, the former college lecturer lived a modest life with his wife and daughter. But the going was not easy for Mr. Das as there was rampant competition from non-bank financial institutions trying to capture the market of rural customers and farmers. After almost a year and half, he had only managed to open 814 accounts with 11 farmers and a cumulative deposit of Tk. 77,93,000. This is when he was integrated within the project by **The Right Kind**. Soon after, he had met up with 4 local retailers who in turn brought him 32 fish farmers -everyone lined up to open accounts. After a cluster meeting organized by **The Right Kind**, farmers became excited about the easy loan application process and very soon 14 of them were approved for a cumulative loan of Tk. 5,50,000.



During the COVID-19 pandemic when everyone's business took a hit, Das' social recognition gained significant traction in the community and candidates from all classes began to approach him to open new accounts and ask for financial advice. Within 6 months, he saw a 31% increase in the number of accounts opened at his booth, with 5 times the previous number of farmers. Currently, with 1,064 accounts under his care and a cumulative deposit of Tk. 1,69,87,000 (a 118% growth compared to the pre-project period), Das is maintaining Tk. 4,00,000 in DPS deposits from 19 farmers and Tk. 10,00,000 in DPS deposits from 2 retailers. Very recently, he opened another agent point of Bank Asia in a nearby market. Bank Asia's Agent Shemul Kumar Das thanks the BAA project, USAID and **The Right Kind** for reinvigorating not only his business but the local economy as well with a focus on aquaculture.

Apart from all these individual cases, at the end of the 1.5 years long project, **The Right Kind** conducted a survey among 120 respondents / farmers over the three districts of the project, which is almost 25% of the total project beneficiaries. Farmers expressed that the advisory support is as important as the financial loan products. This suggests a loan for farmers especially in rural areas should not be a standalone product. It needs to come with financial and technical advisory support for maximum benefit.

Written by
The Right Kind

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For further comments or queries,
please contact **The Right kind** at zunaed.rabbani@therightkindbd.com
Bank Asia at ruhul.motin@bankasia-bd.com