

# Catfish farming helps Chakdah women become self-sufficient

**Halim Mondal**

■ letters@hindustantimes.com

**CHAKDAHA (NADIA):** There was a time when Sarifa Mondal's only child was severely ill but she had no money to get him treated. Money was also a hurdle for Marjina Bibi before the marriage of her daughter. The situation was more or less similar for many families in Tangra village and its adjoining villages in Nadia's Chakdah block as they battled poverty every day. But the financial condition of 210 families in this block has changed dramatically in the last two years since they started breeding and cultivating catfish.

Not only do these women (all the participants are women) have a steady income now, they can give their families nutritious food, send their kids to school and can dream of a better life. The change began with 10 women forming a self-help group, Unnati, in Tangra and starting a money lending business.

In 2014, they and families in other villages came to know about catfish farming. Subsequently, some persons were trained by the fisheries depart-

THANKS TO THIS PROJECT, WE CAN FULFIL OUR DREAMS. NOW, WE ARE GETTING THREE MEALS A DAY, WE CAN SEND OUR KIDS TO SCHOOL AND GO TO A HEALTH CENTRE WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER IS ILL

MARJINA BIBI, a resident of Tangra village

ment in Chakdah. They started breeding and rearing catfish and their journey towards progress began.

Sources in the district administration said in Tangra at first they jointly took a land of 15-cotah on a lease. Seven pits were dug and the project was funded from MGNREGA funds.

The participating families invested some money from the existing fund for running their self-help group. The fingerlings of catfish were available locally. The feed and medicines were also bought from a nearby market. The pits soon became a nursery

for hundreds of catfish. Before starting the project, the members even conducted a survey to determine if there was a market for catfish.

In the first year (2014-15), the total expenditure of the project was Rs 11,50,000 in every village (five phases in one year). In every phase, 1,200 kg fish was produced, the total production being 6,000 kg per year. After selling the catfish for Rs 270 per kg, the income was Rs 16,20,000 (in five phases). The net profit was Rs 4,70,000 in each village. Since 10 families had participated from Tangra village, each earned Rs 47,000 a year.

Babulal Mahato, a top official of the district MGNREGA cell, said, "In Chakdah block, 210 such ponds were part of the project, that is 210 poor families benefited. Each family earned Rs 47,000 per year."

Marjina Bibi, a resident of Tangra, said, "We are now self-employed. We can help our families financially. Thanks to this project, we can fulfil our dreams. Other members of our self-help group are also happy. Now, we are getting three meals a day, we can send our kids to school and go to a health centre when a family member is ill."