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FISH FARMING AS A BUSINESS: LESSONS FROM JAGATSINGHPUR

[1]P. Priyadarshini, [2]M. K. Das* and [3]B. Sethi

Email

manoj.d@srisriuniversity.edu.in

[1]Faculty of Agriculture, Sri Sri University, Godisahi, Odisha-754005, India

[2]Agricultural Economics Department, Faculty of Agriculture, Sri Sri University, Godisahi, Odisha- 754005, India

[3]CPGS-AS, CAU, Umiam, Barapani-793103, Meghalaya, India

Fish farming, or aquaculture, has emerged as one of the fastest-growing food production sectors globally, contributing significantly to food security, employment, and income generation in rural communities (FAO, 2022). In India, the sector has gained strong policy support under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), which promotes scientific aquaculture for enhancing productivity and sustainability (GoI, 2020). Odisha, with its vast aquatic resources, has witnessed substantial growth in aquaculture, particularly in coastal districts like Jagatsinghpur, where fish farming has evolved from subsistence to a profitable enterprise (GoO, 2022; Giri et al., 2020). This article explores how Jagatsinghpur has transformed into a model for sustainable and business-oriented fish farming through scientific practices, women's empowerment, and market-driven approaches.

In the coastal heartland of Odisha, Jagatsinghpur district has quietly become a laboratory of change. Once known for traditional farming and fishing, it is now gaining recognition as a hub where fish farming is being treated not just as a livelihood, but as a thriving business. The district offers valuable lessons for farmers, policymakers, and entrepreneurs alike.

From Subsistence to Enterprise

For years, fish farming in Jagatsinghpur was modest. Small ponds stocked with local fish, harvested mainly for family consumption. But with the introduction of scientific aquaculture, farmers began to realize that ponds could yield more than food; they could yield profit. By adopting practices like proper pond preparation, predator eradication, and use of quality seed, yields in the district have more than doubled, turning what was once a survival strategy into a business opportunity.

Women at the Forefront

A remarkable feature of Jagatsinghpur's fish farming success is the role of women. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have taken charge of ponds, managing them with efficiency and care. For many women, this is their first step into entrepreneurship. Beyond adding to household incomes, fish farming has given them greater independence, decision-making power, and respect in their communities. Their success stories highlight how aquaculture can drive not just economic growth but also social change.

Keys to Business Success

Jagatsinghpur's experience highlights several factors that transform fish farming into a profitable venture:

1. **Scientific Practices:** Systematic pond management, quality fingerlings, and balanced feed are non-negotiable for high yields.
2. **Collective Action:** SHGs and cooperatives help farmers share resources, reduce costs, and strengthen bargaining power in markets.
3. **Access to Credit:** Microfinance and government schemes provide the initial push for farmers to invest in better inputs and infrastructure.
4. **Training and Extension:** Hands-on training from experts helps farmers overcome technical challenges and adopt new practices with confidence.
5. **Market Linkages:** Direct connections to traders, retailers, and cold storage facilities ensure that farmers earn fair prices for their produce.

The Business Mindset

Perhaps the biggest shift in Jagatsinghpur has been the change in mindset. Farmers no longer see fish farming as seasonal or secondary. Rather than relying on tradition alone, they adopt an entrepreneurial approach by analysing costs, assessing returns and strategically planning for the future. For many, the benefit-cost ratio is now competitive with or even better than traditional agriculture.

Case Study Snapshot: Fish Farming in Jagatsinghpur

- **Average Yield Increase:** From 2 tonnes/ha to more than 4 tonnes/ha with scientific practices.
- **Income Growth:** Household earnings up by 20–30% after adopting modern aquaculture.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Over 60% of SHGs in select blocks actively managing ponds.
- **Benefit-Cost Ratio:** Improved from 1.5 (traditional) to 2.3 (scientific methods).
- **Youth Engagement:** Rising participation of rural youth entrepreneurs treating aquaculture as a primary business.

Jagatsinghpur proves that fish farming is more than a livelihood, it's a business model that can deliver economic and social transformation.

Conclusion

Jagatsinghpur shows that with the right mix of science, support, and entrepreneurial spirit, fish farming can thrive as a business. The district's experience underscores the importance of seeing aquaculture not just as an add-on to farming but as a central driver of rural prosperity. As one farmer put it, *"Fish farming is no longer about survival, now it is about building a business and a better life."*

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