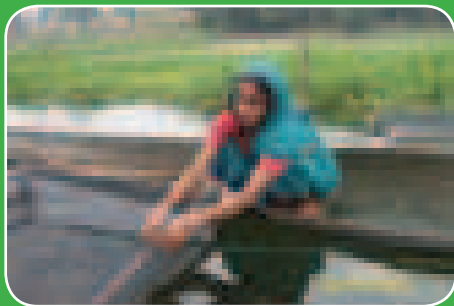


# Today's development agenda benefits from the BAU-Stirling link

Alan Brooks, Team Leader, RLEP



The Rural Livelihoods Evaluation Partnership (RLEP), funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) started in June 2003 to inter alia, manage the annual reviews for the portfolio of projects under the DFID Bangladesh Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP).



Fisheries and non-fisheries projects with direct linkages with BAU (Bangladesh Agricultural University) were well represented with the family of projects under this programme (e.g. FTEP-2, SUFER, FFP, REFPI, CBFM-2). The history behind developing the concept through to project implementation of many of these projects is a legacy from the BAU and Institute of Aquaculture (IoA) collaboration. It is from those early days of DFID funded (then ODA) IoA collaboration and support for education and research to the Faculty of Fisheries, BAU that led to establishing a specific fisheries and aquaculture development portfolio within the ODA/DFID office at First Secretary level and even a DFID supported satellite office, Fisheries Management Support (FMS) dedicated to the development of government institutions, NGOs and importantly, the livelihoods of fishers and pond farmers across the country. Over the years, the numerous projects managed by this office have led to significant developmental impact which may be attributed to this original collaboration.



Over the past 25 years, projects have largely focussed on capacity building and infrastructure development providing institutions with the necessary skills and resources to fulfil their national mandates but over the past 5 years there has been a significant shift in thinking towards development with more focus on influencing the 'drivers of change'. So as the development community and the Government of Bangladesh strive towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasis is shifting away from the relatively small sectoral natural resource projects to

make way for larger programmatic initiatives with greater focus on improving governance with good public policies and strengthening institutions, developing better access to services and markets, empowerment of poor people, improved security, health and education reform with a special emphasis on addressing gender disparities particularly relevant to the MDG indicators.

The projects within the RLP portfolio, to some extent, reflect this shift towards organisational development, influencing policy (although limited due to small size of projects) and empowering people to manage their own resources and demand better services. Project-wise details are available from the RLEP office and the most relevant recent work with BAU from the DFID Bangladesh office would be the SUFER and REFPI projects. Both were able to demonstrate advantages of managing research through a competitive grant scheme and the benefits of research work targeting poor people especially women and utilising the comparative advantages of NGOs when conducting field based action research. The inclusion of sustainable livelihoods approaches and social development analyses added new dimensions to the university research perspective and ability to respond to the needs of poor fishers and farmers directly. Although the systems and processes implemented by the projects were not institutionalised the universities and partners have shown that they are very capable of implementing this type of pro-poor action research, which could be sustained within an appropriate institutional and policy environment. Notwithstanding direct impact project achievements, if the donor community and GoB guided by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) are successful with the reform process, the legacy of this work and indeed the collaboration between IoA, BAU and DFID will ultimately become a significant contribution to the organisational development process. One important role for RLEP is to provide the institutional memory to ensure that the lessons learned from the projects are incorporated into this wider and more comprehensive reform process.





# Fields of Fish

Exhibitions and drama at the Eden Project and Edinburgh Mela - Summer 2004

Anton Immink, Information Coordinator, DFID-AFGRP

RLEP's communication strategy aims to distil important lessons from the programme and communicate them through a variety of methods to improve future planning for decision-makers within government of Bangladesh and the wider donor community. The 15 generic themes (e.g. community co-management, partnerships, competitive grant schemes, livelihoods impact, gender, institutional reform etc.) across the programme are documented in the annual review reports, specific project documentation and thematic lessons papers available through the RLEP office and its hosted password protected site Rural Livelihoods Exchange. Access is available upon request at rlep@betsbd.com. The RLE site is password protected because it is an interactive discussion site for members to debate on important development issues. For example, the present debate focuses on use of livelihood indicators in development projects.

The information brokering function of RLEP will be sustained through the Local Consultative Group (LCG) website ([www.lcgbangladesh.org](http://www.lcgbangladesh.org)). Important project related documentation, including fisheries material will be archived at the site. This is a very important long-standing forum for senior policy and donor decision makers set up for development dialogue and donor coordination. Although DFIDB may not be supporting projects directly with the Faculty of Fisheries at BAU and is unlikely in the near future to support relatively small natural resource, farming, and fisheries development projects, the investment thus far has contributed significantly to the development of the sector and recent innovations are likely to become very important contributors to the implementation of a new era of donor assistance through programmatic approaches committed to organisational reform and development-linked research.

Alan Brooks is former Team Leader of FTEP-2 (1999-2003) and studied the M.Sc. in Aquaculture and Fisheries Management at the Institute of Aquaculture in 1987-88.

## Introduction

2004 is the International Year of Rice (IYR). This is the first time that the United Nations has dedicated a year to a commodity. Late in 2003 the Eden Project contacted the Institute of Aquaculture to learn more about their research looking at opportunities for poor farmers to grow fish in their rice fields. Eden liked the idea of the story and wished to include it in their exhibits to celebrate IYR. As the rice-fish work is funded by DFID-AFGRP (Aquaculture and Fish Genetics Research Programme) it was seen as an opportunity to promote the work of the Programme to the UK public, especially as Eden is the one of the most popular visitor attractions in the UK.

The Eden Project is an educational visitor attraction built in a former quarry near the town of St Austell in Cornwall. It aims to promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources leading to a sustainable future for all. The displays at Eden reflect different wild and managed ecosystems, with plants growing under huge glass domes from around the globe. The glass domes are known as biomes and the main exhibits are from the humid tropics and the warm temperate. There is also a large outdoor space growing plants more familiar to western Europe. With well over a million visitors a year, Eden offered an ideal opportunity to raise the profile of our research to an audience interested in sustainable development.

In March, Dr Benoy Barman, who is managing field work in Bangladesh, and Anton Immink from AFGRP visited the Eden Project for a day. Benoy enthused staff members at Eden with tales of fish production in the rice fields of Bangladesh and raised issues relating to biodiversity from rice fields, fish as agents in integrated pest management (IPM) and the role of the whole family in ensuring sustainable food production methods.

## Potential for exhibits

Opportunities for dissemination included placing model fish within the rice exhibit being built in the Humid Tropics Biome (HTB); an exhibition in the Live space; a drama elsewhere on-site; a permanent information point in the public resting space around the main rice exhibit; an article in the Friends of Eden magazine, and a seminar evening. The displays and events aimed to raise awareness amongst the public of issues relating to international development using the rice and fish story and images of daily life in Bangladesh as the vehicle.

## Building the rice-fish exhibit unit

David Craddock from Eden visited Stirling to discuss ideas and practicalities for the exhibition unit. Ambitious designs were given a reality check because of the harsh conditions within the Humid Tropics Biome at Eden. The final design can be seen in the picture. Images came from AFGRP, IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) and the BBC Weather Centre. Model fish crafted especially in Bangladesh were used in the top section. In the two months following installation more than 200,000 visitors have seen the exhibit. The exhibit will remain in place at least until the end of 2005.

## Friends of Eden article and seminar

Regular visitors to Eden, and those wishing to support its work, sign up to become Friends of Eden. One of the perks, especially for those who live nearby, is that there is a regular seminar programme. Dave Little and Benoy Barman offered to give a presentation to the Friends of Eden about the work in Bangladesh. It was decided that it might be useful to provide people with a meal consisting of rice and fish to go with the talk. Tilapia from a small local producer in Honiton, Devon, were used in the meal. Even though friends had to pay to attend this seminar to contribute to the cost of the food, it was one of the most highly subscribed events the group has had, and everyone enjoyed the food and the presentation.

## Fields of Fish Eden Live

There was a steady stream of visitors to the Eden Live pod for each of the three days of our exhibit, and there was plenty for people to see and do. As well as wide range of posters covering topics like 'connecting rice

