



Fields of Fish

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

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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). 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.

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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.

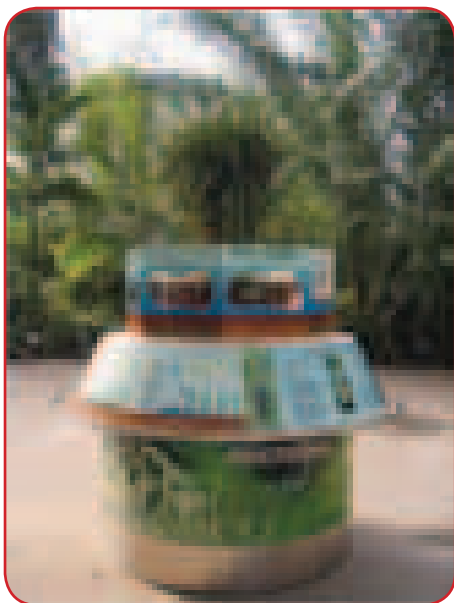
Friends of Eden article and seminar

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





fields and ponds, 'fair trade facts' and 'gender and aquaculture', there were interactive exhibits including a computer game, 'snakes and ladders', quizzes and also interesting decorations like a cast net, fish traps, models of exotic fruit, children's books from Bangladesh, musical instruments and rice sorting trays. A video ran on a loop for people to learn more about life in Bangladesh and how successfully people adapt to harsh conditions. Dave Little and Benoy Barman presented the talk they had given to the Friends of Eden.

Edinburgh Mela

At the Edinburgh Mela the exhibition space was reduced 20 fold from that at Eden to a booth just 3x3m. Filling the stand with the range of items displayed at Eden was not a problem. Deciding on the main things to exhibit proved tricky, especially as only a few visitors at a time could get close to individual posters. But we fitted most of it in, and again many people showed a lot of interest.

The drama 'Fishless'

The MacRobert arts centre, here in the university, researched, devised and performed a play to bring to life the story of rice and fish. Enabling the community theatre group to put the show together and put it on the road was a great experience for everyone. There were ten performances at Eden over three days and seven at the Edinburgh Mela over two days. Each performance was given to a full house of around 70 people. The show had to be adapted from an indoor performance at Eden to an outdoor performance at Mela, but everyone did a great job and the audiences loved it.

Schools pack

A schools pack has been developed on the wider rice-fish story in order to enable children age 9-11 to consider the decisions a farmer would have to make when deciding how to grow fish and rice. If you would like a schools pack please contact afgrp@stir.ac.uk

Who came to visit?

Over the Fields of Fish Live weekend, visitor numbers were 20,000 to Eden as a whole and about 100 people an hour passed through the Live Pod over the three days, around 10% of visitors to Eden. Overall, around 3,000 people interacted directly with the Live events at Eden.

At the Edinburgh Mela, visitor numbers to the two day event as a whole were 40,000. Of those, it is estimated that more than 1,000 people interacted directly with the Exhibition, and again audiences of around 70 people watched the drama at each of the seven performances. Audience interaction differed here because the drama was performed outside and was competing on volume with various other non-dramatic attractions.

Links to Bangladesh and the Edinburgh Mela

As you will see from other articles in this edition, 2004 is the year that the Institute of Aquaculture celebrates 25 years of linkage with Bangladesh.

The coincidence of this celebration with events at Eden led us to approach the Bangladesh British Chamber of Commerce. Will Leschen made initial contact with Dr Wali Uddin, Director of the BBCC and Edinburgh businessman. Dr Wali Uddin came to the Institute of Aquaculture in May this year and presentations were made at BBCC meetings of the Stirling-Bangladesh linkage and AFGRP Programme activities in Bangladesh. At one of these meetings arrangements were made for a stand at the Edinburgh Mela, a South Asian cultural festival, and a chance to present the drama being developed for Eden once more.



Current PhD student Almas Gheyas with Dr Wali Uddin and Dr Dave Penman in the aquarium



Acknowledgements

Without the great team effort on the part of researchers at the Institute of Aquaculture; staff at Eden, particularly Andrew Ormerod; the MacRobert arts centre for the drama Fishless, centrally to Mari Binnie; the exhibit build team, notably Mike Cameron at Instant Image; the Graphics team at Stirling, especially Lynne McNaughton; and Centre for Environment Education, India, it would not have been possible to pull this off.