Ribbon retting – A cost effective and eco-friendly jute retting method

Background

Jute is the second most important natural fibre in Bangladesh after cotton contributing 4% to the national GDP. Bangladesh produces around 33% of the total global jute production and it is the largest exporter in the world with around 29% as raw jute.

However, the jute sector of Bangladesh is hindered by lack of availability of quality seed, retting problems, mill efficiency, product diversification issues and market linkages. Katalyst took initiatives to overcome some of these challenges to boost the jute sector in Bangladesh.

Presently, Katalyst is promoting ribbon retting in five districts namely Gopalganj, Jessore, Kustia, Rangpur, and Lalonirhat.

Why ribbon retting is important?

Around 3 million farmers are engaged in jute cultivation in Bangladesh. Most of these farmers use the time-consuming conventional retting process in the ponds and rivers which hampers the quality of the jute fibre as well as pollutes the environment with large amount of biomasses decomposing in the stagnant water.

Ribbon retting method is much more convenient compared to the conventional retting process because, ribbon retting takes only ¼ the time and requires much less water. In Ribbon retting, ribbons are stripped out from the stem of mature jute plants, coiled and allowed to ret under water bodies - which farmers can create artificially by digging a hole and filling it with small amount of water. Ribbon retting also ensures the overall quality, texture and colour of jute which are critical elements for making jute diversified products and export. The improved quality of jute using the ribbon retting technology also gets jute farmers a better price and increases their overall profit.

Katalyst’s intervention

Katalyst in collaboration with Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI) has taken an initiative to familiarize the farmers with the ribbon retting techniques in five districts. Katalyst with the help of BJRI supported the establishment of demonstration plots and farmer field meetings in areas where jute production is being hampered due to shortage of water. Government extension officers were also part of the program.

50 demonstrations were organised (10 in each of the 5 districts) during the last few months. Many farmers responded positively on the demonstrations and started adapting the ribbon retting technique.
The ribbon retting method saved the farmers the cost of transporting jute to nearby water bodies as well as allowed increased quantity of jute to be retted at a time than the conventional method.

**Way forward**

The promotion of the ribbon retting technique in five selected districts was initiated by Katalyst as a pilot to identify the impact on farmers’ income as a result of adopting the retting method. Katalyst believes that the best scale agent to spread the knowledge of ribbon retting among farmers is the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE). Katalyst is in the process of documenting the impact of the pilot programme which will be shared through a dissemination workshop with the DAE. Based on the impact, Katalyst may support the DAE in institutionalizing mechanisms to provide such information among other farmers throughout Bangladesh.

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