Conclusion

This leaflet provides an overview of the intended direction and coverage of the proposed project. However, the approach, scope and outputs from the project are intended to meet the needs of stakeholders. Therefore, if you have any comments concerning the intended project, your experience of being involved with this research or any suggestions of how to improve the project, please contact one of the project team leaders. Please also contact us if you wish to find out more about the project or have any specific requirements for information or outputs.

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Introduction

Despite a long and productive history the threats to farming in the East Calcutta Wetlands have never been as great. Why is this the case when the benefits of employment and food from these systems are known?
Project Overview

Despite much research and investigation into the management and problems of farming systems around Kolkata, especially in the East Kolkata Wetlands, few of the findings and recommendations have been implemented. This has lead to widespread scepticism concerning the potential benefit of further research. To date most of this research and survey work has focused on the management and economics of the farming systems; the importance of these systems in the livelihoods of poor households and communities has not been considered in detail.

Although it is recognised that these systems must be financially viable to be sustained, little consideration has been given to what impact the loss of these systems may have on the vulnerable and poor communities and households that depend on them.

Project objectives

This study aims to focus specifically on the role of farming systems around Kolkata in the livelihoods of poor people to see how they benefit:

- directly from permanent employment e.g. fishermen,
- directly from temporary employment e.g. casual labourers,
- through employment in the supply and distribution networks e.g. seed traders and market vendors,
- through payment-in-kind for work undertaken on the farms e.g. weed clearing and carrying fish to market,
- from supplies of affordable fish and vegetables to markets serving the poor,
- from the managed reuse of waste, mitigating environmental degradation and reducing health risks,
- or from the overall improvement in environmental quality due to the existence of peri-urban farming.

How do we intend to do this study?

Unlike previous projects we wish to consolidate existing knowledge, but not repeat the work of others.

- Working with farmers

An initial survey of production systems was undertaken to assess the numbers and background of people whose livelihood depends either directly or indirectly on farming at the Kolkata peri-urban interface. Findings from this work are being used to help guide a more focused assessment of the benefits poor people derive from these systems.

- Working with poor communities

Representatives from poor communities, together with farm managers and government officials, were recently invited to attend a workshop where general issues concerning the role of peri-urban farming in the livelihoods of poor people was discussed.

Based on findings from this workshop we now intend to focus specifically on poor communities that benefit from peri-urban farming. Using focus groups and household interviews we will talk directly with representative groups to gauge the magnitude of the benefits derived from their involvement in peri-urban farming and discuss the problems they face and opportunities they perceive.

- Working with senior stakeholders

To ensure that project findings and recommendations are implemented we are trying to work closely with senior stakeholders. Representatives from relevant government agencies will be interviewed to better understand their perceptions of peri-urban farming. Furthermore, they will be invited to attend a meeting where findings from the project will be presented and appropriate publications and media will be developed to inform the wider stakeholder community.

Why are your views important?

Your views are important to help us better understand the current status, problems facing the farming system, and the benefits being conferred on the poor. Therefore we intend to ask:

- what are the problems with the current situation?
- what is the future for these farming practices?
- what are the views of those affected?
- why should we try and preserve this system?
- what are the benefits associated with the system?

What do we plan to do with this study?

Outputs from this research will be presented to local government departments with responsibility for managing and planning development in peri-urban Kolkata. Findings will be disseminated to local NGOs and other aid agencies to help them target their resources. Project partners and DFID will use knowledge generated concerning opportunities to enhance poor livelihoods through improved peri-urban natural resource management to guide future research that addresses specific problems.

Who are we?

The research team consists of members from both local and international organisations. Dr Nitai Kundu, Institute of Wetland Management and Ecological Design and Dr Mukherjee, Department of Fisheries have a longstanding interest in researching problems facing the poor. With contributions from Dr Stuart Bunting, Dr David Little and Dr Samantha Punch from the University of Stirling, Professor Phil Harris, Henry Doubleday Research Association and Professor Peter Edwards, Asian Institute of Technology, prospects for meaningful findings that may be used to enhance the livelihoods of the poor are good.