

Support to the members of the fishing community in Murshidabad district during the Covid-19 lockdown

In terms of fish culture and fishers in West Bengal, the Murshidabad district has always held a special place. The total number of fisher people of the district is 353,174 and most of them belong to the socially and economically backward scheduled caste (SC) category. This district has the highest number of fisher folks in the SC category in West Bengal.

DISHA, in collaboration with Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), is trying to support the fishing community in this district to get organised and establish their rights as a community. After the outbreak of COVID-19, their livelihood suffered badly because of the long lockdown. Initially, fishing activities were not allowed. Even when these were allowed with restrictions, markets were dull. Whatever little savings the fishers and fish vendors had were spent. DISHA and Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum tried to reach them and provided support to 1047 families up to the end of June 2020.



- 163 families in Hariharpara block (Malopara, Fataipur & Ramkrishnapur)
- 186 families in Murshidabad-Jiaganj (MJ) block (Prasadpur, Tentuliya & Nawda)
- 211 families in Nabagram block (Dafarpur & Nabagram)
- 142 families in Jalangi block (Kajipara & Singhpara colony)
- 63 families in Raninagar-II block (Katlamari Guripara & Katlamari Halderpara)
- 213 families in Berhampore block (Kumradaha Ghat, Gandhi Colony)
- 69 families in Bhagwangola II block (Ranitala)

Hariharpara Block

Hariharpara is a census town and block in Murshidabad district. The total area of Hariharpara is 253.14 sq km. Hariharpara CD Block is bounded by Raninagar I CD Block in the north, Behrampore CD block in North-West, Domkal CD Block in the east, Naoda CD Block in the south and Beldanga I CD Blocks in the west.

The fish workers of Hariharpara and Behrampore block used to fish from Bhandardaha Beel (a water area of about 330 ha located at about 32 km southeast of Behrampur town), Bhairab River, and other local water bodies. After fishing, most of the fishers used to take their fish to the wholesale market of Behrampore. Some of the fishers even used to sell fish door to door for their livelihood. Lockdown has completely paralysed the process, putting the lives and livelihoods of these fish workers at stake. The most affected areas are Malopara, Fatehpur, Govindopur, & Ramkrishnapur village in Hariharpara block. The fishers in Behrampore municipality areas are equally affected.

Up to the end of June 2020, more than 163 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil in this block.

On the 22nd of May 2020, 14 families of the fishing community at **Char Malopara** village under Malopara GP in Hariharpara Block were provided rations of rice, lentil, soya beans and other food items.



On the 1st of June 2020, 51 men and 7 women fishworkers from **Fatehpur Govindopur** village, under Hariharpara GP, were provided rations of oil, soya beans, rice and other food items.

On the same date, 82 men and 9 women fishworkers at **Ramkrishnapur** village, under Dharampur GP, were provided rations of rice, pulses, soap and other items.





Berhampur Block

Berhampore is a community development block that forms an administrative division in Barhampur subdivision of Murshidabad district. Berhampore CD Block is bounded by Murshidabad-Jiaganj CD Block in the north, Hariharpara CD Block in the east, Beldanga I CD Block in the south and Nabagram CD Block, in the west. Berhampore CD Block has an area of 314.19 sq. km.



Up to the end of June 2020, more than 156 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil in this block.

MJ (Murshidabad-Jiaganj) Block

Murshidabad-Jiaganj is a community development block that forms an administrative division in Lalbag subdivision of Murshidabad district. Murshidabad-Jiaganj CD Block is bounded by Bhagawangola I and Bhagawangola II CD Blocks in the north, Raninagar I CD Block in the east, Berhampore CD Block in the south and Nabagram CD Block in the west. Murshidabad-Jiaganj CD Block has an area of 192.13 sq. km.

The large number of fish workers in this block are dependent either on Bhagirathi river or various beels (large surface water-bodies that accumulate surface runoff water through internal drainage channels) for fishing. Some of the fish vendors collect fish from local or neighbouring wholesale fish markets and sell them for livelihood. These fish-workers are the worst affected due to the lockdown.

Up to the end of June 2020, more than 186 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil in this block.

On 23rd of May 2020, 130 Women fish workers at **Prasadpur** were provided rations of rice, pulses and other food items.



On 7th of June 2020, food rations of rice, pulses, soap and other items were provided to 52 men and 4 Women fish workers (Total 56 persons) at **Tetuliya and Nawda village** in M.J. Block.



Nabagram Block

Nabagram CD Block is bounded by Sagardighi CD Block in the north, Murshidabad-Jiaganj and Berhampore CD Blocks in the east, Khargram CD Block in the south and Rampurhat II CD Block, in Birbhum district, in the west. Nabagram CD Block has an area of 306.63 sq. km.

Dafarpur & Basudebpur villages of Shibpur GP are known for the high concentration of women fish vendors. Almost 80% of the local community females are associated with fish vending. Fish is collected from the wholesale markets of either Behrampore or Nabagram, 8-10 km away. Then these fish vendors sell the fish either at Behrampore market or at Nabagram market. Some of them even go to Sagardighi market to sell the fish. Those, who do not have a fixed place to sell the fish, visit nearby villages. The lockdown due to COVID-19 halted the entire process, jeopardising the livelihoods of fish vendors of these two villages.

Up to the end of June 2020, more than 211 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil in this block.

On 26th of May 2020, 91 Women fish workers at **Dafarpur** were provided rations of rice, pulses and other food items.



On 28th of May 2020, rations of rice, pulses, soap and other items were provided to 80 men and 40 Women fish workers (Total 120 persons) at **Nabagram**.



Jalangi Block

Jalangi CD Block is bounded by Charghat and Bagha upazilas in Rajshahi District of Bangladesh across the Padma, and Daulatpur Upazila in Kushtia District of Bangladesh, in the north and in the east, Karimpur I CD Block in Nadia district, in the south and Raninagar I, Raninagar II and Domkal CD Blocks in the west. Jalangi CD Block has an area of 210.63 sq. km.

Up to the end of June 2020, more than 142 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil.

Murshidabad district has a 125.35 km long international border with Bangladesh of which 42.35 km is on land and the remaining is riverine. There are 9 blocks in this district lying along the India-Bangladesh border. Jalangi and Raninagar - II are two such blocks. The fish workers of both these blocks share the same story. The fishers of these two blocks catch fish from River Padma - lying on the international border. They need to obtain permission from BSF to fish in the Indian side of the river. However, due to the country wide lockdown for the COVID-19 outbreak, the fishing activity was completely ceased. The livelihood of the fishing community was severely affected. The most affected areas in these two blocks are Singhpara, Haldarpara under Sagarpara GP and Kajipara under Debipur GP of Jalangi block and Katlamari Guripara in Raninagar - II block. Concentration of women fishworkers can be seen in Katalamari Guripara in Raninagar-II block.

On 27th of May 2020, 22 Women fish workers of the local fishing community at **Kajipara village under Debipur GP** were provided rations of rice, pulses and other food items.



On the 2nd of June 2020, 110 men and 10 Women fish workers (Total 120 persons) were provided rice and other food items at **Singhpara colony under Sagarpara GP.**



Raninagar II Block

Raninagar II CD Block is bounded by Rajshahi city, Paba Upazila, Motihar Thana and Charghat Upazila in Rajshahi District of Bangladesh, across the Padma, in the north, Jalangi CD Block in the east, Raninagar I and Domkal CD Blocks in the south and Bhagawangola II CD Block in the west. Raninagar II CD Block has an area of 175.13 sq. km.

Till June 2020, more than 63 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil.

On 2nd of June 2020, rations of rice, pulses, edible oil and other items were provided to 15 Women fish workers of fishing community at **Katlamari Guripara.**



On the same day, 33 men and 15 Women fish workers (Total 48 persons) of the fishing community at **Katlamari Haldarpara** were provided rations of rice, pulses, potato, and other food items.



Bhagwangola II Block

Bhagawangola II CD Block is bounded by Godagari and Paba upazilas in Rajshahi District of Bangladesh, across the Padma, in the north, Raninagar II CD Block in the east, Murshidabad-Jiaganj and Raninagar I CD Blocks in the south and Bhagawangola I CD Block in the west.

Up to the end of June 2020, more than 69 families were provided food supplies like rice, lentil, soya bean chunks, salt, and edible oil.

On 27th of June 2020, 69 fish workers of the local fishing community at Ranitala were provided rations of rice, pulses, potato, and other food items. People from neighbouring villages like **Ranitala, Khoribona, Sorolpur, and Akhrigunj** benefitted from this program.