

Success Story of Mrs. Laxmi Bai Nayak:

A Journey of Transformation from Tanda Village, Narohna Sankal Panchayat
(Under the Leadership of Dr. Brijesh Sharma, President, SEC)

The inspiring journey of **Mrs. Laxmi Bai Nayak**, a resident of **Tanda** village in Narohna Sankal Panchayat, stands as a shining testament to how community-driven initiatives combined with innovative technology can transform lives. Her story reflects the powerful impact of the River Pen Fish Culture Project implemented by the Society for Environmental Conservation (SEC), Bhopal, and showcases how women from rural and economically marginalized backgrounds can emerge as successful entrepreneurs when provided with the right knowledge, tools, and encouragement.

A New Beginning: From Vulnerability to Opportunity

Coming from an economically vulnerable family with very limited livelihood options, Laxmi Bai's daily life was defined by financial struggles and uncertainty. Traditional occupations offered little scope for income enhancement, and the high investment required for conventional aquaculture made fish farming seem like an impossible dream.

Her path began to change when she joined the **Dharti Self-Help Group (SHG)** formed under the project. The SHG not only became a platform for collective learning and savings but also a gateway for her to access new livelihood opportunities. Through this network, she was introduced to the project's **low-cost, innovative river pen culture** technique implemented in the Ajnal Dam a method that eliminated the need for large ponds or heavy capital investments.

For the first time, Laxmi Bai saw a livelihood option that was *accessible, sustainable, and economically promising*.

Embracing Innovation: Sustainable Feeding for Sustainable Growth

One of the key factors behind Laxmi Bai's remarkable success was her keen interest in learning and implementing sustainable aquaculture practices taught during SEC's technical sessions. She adopted **natural feeding systems**, using:

- **Periphyton**
- *Azolla*, a nutrient-rich aquatic fern

This eco-friendly feeding model minimized the need for expensive commercial feed, which she previously believed was the major obstacle to entering fish farming.

In her own words:

"Before the training, pen fish farming seemed too complex and expensive because of the commercial feed costs. Learning to use natural feed like Azolla was a game-changer. It felt like we were using the river's own strength to grow our fish"

Her diligence in maintaining the pen, monitoring water quality, and applying sustainable feeding practices ensured healthy, fast-growing fish and contributed to the preservation of the river ecosystem one of the project's core environmental objectives.

A Harvest of Hope: Economic and Social Transformation

Laxmi Bai's first harvest marked a turning point. The fish grown using the natural, low-cost pen culture method were of superior quality and fetched excellent prices in the local market. With input costs significantly low, her profit margins were impressively high. The additional income empowered her in multiple ways:

1. Improved Household Nutrition

She invested in more nutritious food for her family, ensuring better health outcomes directly contributing to the project's long-term nutritional security goals.

2. Education for Her Children

With renewed confidence and financial stability, she enrolled her children in better educational facilities, opening doors to opportunities her family had never had before.

3. Rise in Household and Community Status

Her success elevated her role within her household and earned her respect in the broader community. She transitioned from being a marginalized resident with limited opportunities to a confident, self-reliant entrepreneur. Today, she is often approached by other women for guidance and inspiration.

4. A Role Model for Women Empowerment

Laxmi Bai's journey reflects the potential of rural women to become catalysts of sustainable development when equipped with the right skills and support structures. Her transformation has encouraged many other women in Narohna Sankal Panchayat to join SHGs and explore innovative livelihoods.

Value Addition Training: Expanding Market Reach and Income Potential

To amplify the economic benefits for women like Laxmi Bai, a **two-day hands-on training programme on Value-Added Fish Products** was organized from **8–9 June 2025** in Tanda Village. This training was conducted jointly by:

- **Department of Zoology & Applied Aquaculture, Barkatullah University, Bhopal**
- **Society for Environmental Conservation (SEC), Bhopal**

A total of **33 participants**, including members of the **Dharti SHG**, attended the training with great enthusiasm.



Under the Leadership of Dr. Brijesh Sharma, President, SEC: Pem Fish Culture.





Under the Leadership of Dr. Brijesh Sharma, President, SEC: Value-Added Fish Product Making Programme.

What Are Value-Added Fish Products?

Value-added fish products are processed, preserved, or flavored fish items that offer:

- higher market value
- increased shelf life
- greater consumer convenience
- expanded business opportunities

This approach enables fish farmers to move beyond selling raw fish and venture into micro-enterprises.

Products Demonstrated and Prepared: Participants were trained to convert *low-value fish mince* into *high-value marketable products*, including:

- Fish Cutlets
- Fish Balls
- Fish Fingers
- Fish Sausages
- Fish Fillets
- Fish Cakes
- Smoked Fish
- Fish Soup

The training broadened their understanding of product quality, hygiene, packaging, and storage key competencies for running home-based enterprises.

Unlocking Market Potential:

The value-added products hold strong promise due to:

- increasing consumer preference for ready-to-cook foods
- longer shelf life enabling broader market reach
- higher profit margins compared to raw fish
- suitability for local shops, weekly markets, catering units, and small-scale branding

By diversifying their product range, women like Laxmi Bai can now build profitable micro-enterprises, boost family income, and create local employment opportunities.

A Story of Strength, Innovation, and Empowerment:

The journey of Mrs. Laxmi Bai Nayak exemplifies how sustainable technologies, community-based support, and capacity building can transform lives at the grassroots level. From an economically vulnerable woman to a successful fish entrepreneur, livelihood generation and role model, her story is an inspiring example of rural empowerment. Her growth and that of her community demonstrates that when innovation meets opportunity, even the smallest village can become a hub of transformation.