

## **MUKTI VISIT**

**Date of visit** - 27 to 29 April, 2019

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### **Location:**

*Vill+Post : Purba Sridharpur, Raidighi, S-24 Parganas, WB*

### **About MUKTI and its SAM program:**

Mukti is a non-profit socio-economic developmental organization based in Sunderbans that has been working for the development of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in Sunderbans over the last 15 years now. After the cyclone Aila in 2009 Mukti started its work in the field of organic farming to reclaim the land and enhance the productivity of land. Mukti has been providing 6000 farmers with the support of practicing sustainable agricultural methods of farming. Special efforts have been made to improve the income of landless and marginal farmers.

### **Purpose of visit:**

The purpose of this visit has been to try and understand the overall grass root issues and the on-going programs that are dealing or addressing the problems in the Sunderbans region. Also, to understand the progress of sustainable agricultural program being implemented in different villages. And a special focus of this visit to meet with the people who are still depending on the forest of Sunderbans so that we could explore the scope of work on the climate change issue in the delta.

### **Meeting with a mixed group of people who are depending on Sunderbans for living:**

A few points that came up during the meeting with the meeting:

- 1 jungle hive could produce 30 kg of honey. You can't collect honey round the year. You have to wait for the flowering season of mangroves. We leave at least 1 to 2 feet from the base of the hive so that the bees can weave a new hive from there. We have a group of five people. We go for 3 days in the deep jungle to collect honey. The honey we collect in 3 days costs around Rs. 7,000 - said Basudev Gayen (age 60) from chatterji-para.
- Numbers of fish including Meen have gone down drastically over the years. Also the forest officers harass the fishermen those who do not have "Boat license certificate"
- Kamini Halder (66) - Our 4 bigha got flooded in Aila. The govt made mud dykes on my affected lands.
- Dasarat Halder (76) - Over the last 30 years our 10 bighas of land had gone permanently under water.

### Meeting with the SAM project staff:

Here are some key information that has been shared by the staff during our meeting to understand the progress of the SAM project.

Block : Mathurapur - II

GP : 2

Village : 8

Total number of farmers : 6,000

Target of new farmer this year : 2,000

Pillar (resource) farmer : 70 (informal)

Collecting organic vegetables from : 30 farmers

Farmers growing 100% vegetables (roughly) : 150

Questions	Current status
Operational Block	Mathurapur - II
Number of operational Gram Panchayat	2
Number of operational village	8
Number of existing farmers	6,000
How many farmer groups you have?	We have a farmers' forum called MOFA
How many farmers are not using any chemicals and pesticides? (100% organic)	150 (currently)
How many farmers are not using pesticides but they use chemical fertilizers? (70 % organic)	Not known
Number of resource farmers you have?	70 pillar farmers
How many farmers have you provided with marketing facilities?	30 so far
Amount of organic vegetables being produced / month	3000 kg
How many marketing outlets you have?	3 & many individuals customers are there
How many organic customers you have? A rough figure. (if applicable)	?
Target number of farmers in 2019 – 2020?	2500
Target for soil test	150
Target for PGS certificate	50
Numbers farmers details given for the WBCST proposal [list of farmers]	2031

**Book Bank Program:**

This book bank is located at the ground floor of the MUKTI field office in Sunderbans. It has a pretty good collection of user-specific books and it is maintained quite well. In fact, we had the farmers meeting inside the book bank where I got a chance to see the bank and also spoke to the program coordinator there.

I found this program as a unique idea, especially in the remote villages of the island where communication and transportation is such a big issue. It is indeed quite challenging for the young students to continue their education for many reasons.

- Most of the earning members of the family are smallholders, migrant labourers, fish and crab collectors, wood and honey collectors etc. Economic marginalisation and poverty is one of the main hindrances for the students to get their education done
- Lack of communication facilities and access to resources like books and other support for a student is also a vital issue in the delta.
- Most of the students are first-generation learners, so the lack of guidance for their education has always been there.

Given these challenges the book bank is playing a key role for many students to get their education. It provides the students with books according to their grade course for one year. After one year the student is supposed to return his/her books to the bank. This support means a lot for the students who are pursuing higher education because it requires a variety of expensive books.

Currently this book bank is working through the school level committees in 45 schools in and around Sunderbans. Around 5,000 students have been benefited from the book bank.

**Coaching Centre:**

The idea of a coaching classes for the students go well with the concept of book bank in the remote villages. Children are involved in many activities in the village area and especially in the poor families. They are often got involved in household chores, off farm activities and also help their parents in many ways. The limited scope of educational facilities in the government schools are not enough for these underprivileged students. Therefore these tutorial classes are really helpful for the students.

Mukti coaching center runs in 9 villages providing tuition classes to students from class 5 to 10. The subjects taught are English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Life Science, History, Geography and Bengali. Classes are held early in the morning at various school premises and Mukti coaching center.

## **MUKTI Institute of Technology:**

Mukti is also running a computer name Mukti institute of technology where students can come and learn the basic computer application course along with the classes to sharpen their skills in spoken english. This course is completely free of cost for underprivileged students. It is designed to orient the students and develop their skills so that they can be ready for the job opportunities. Currently the centre has the capacity to accommodate 20 students per batch.

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### **Pictures from the visit**



*Mukti seed bank at the SAM field office*




*One of the coaching centres at SAM field office*



*An organic farmer who supplies organic cucumbers to Mukti-Fresh*

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