**Transforming lands, transforming lives:**

**Hope for millions living on the edge of mighty rivers in Bangladesh**

**By**

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Abstract: E.F. Schumacher, an economist who founded Practical Action (former ITDG), wanted to help expand aid programs through technology.

Fueled by the idea of developing and promoting appropriate technology to reach a greater segment of the underprivileged population of the world, he published an article in The Observer, on August 29, 1965 titled “How to help them help themselves.” The thought leader contemplated: “The western world spends hundreds of millions of pounds on aid to developing countries. But what if this aid, so far from reducing misery, is actually increasing it?”

How economic theories materialized in Bangladesh!

It has been 50 years since Schumacher founded Practical Action. Now, we take the opportunity to look back and reflect: how did his ideas translate into real solutions for those in need around the world? How technology is challenging poverty? Out of the many innovations, we invite you to join us in exploring the novel idea of “cropping on the sand.” Simple as this may sound, it is an example of how a small idea can have a big impact on building resilience for communities facing some of the world’s most pressing issues.

‘Sandbar cropping’ is an innovative, cost-effective technology that transforms silted barren sandy lands created by flooding into arable farmland. This has helped thousands of families in Bangladesh that are displaced from land degradation and suffer from poverty, hunger, and malnourishment. The technique has experienced widespread adaption in five northwestern districts of the country.

Bangladesh is a deltaic country in the Ganges system and vast floodplains having a catchment area of about 1.72 million Sq. km. Only 7% lies within the country with an estimated 1723 Sq.km of newly accreted transitional lands, locally known as charland.

After each rainy season, large sandbar appears in the river basins. These 'lands' are common property but, until now have not been used for productive purpose by any quarter. The project successfully demonstrated growing of pumpkins in small compost pits dug into the sand highly profitable. Since 2005, over 15,000 beneficiaries (women 50%) have produced over 90,000 MT of pumpkins worth over £10m. The cost-benefit ratio to be from 1:5 to 1:7 based on investment pattern.

It can be stored in houses over a year. It greatly assists the poor households with higher income and food security in the lean season. Sandbar cropping has really transformed barren landscapes 'mini deserts' into productive green fields with high returns and effective adaptation options to climate change. This technology can be easily replicated in similar parts of the world to benefit millions of extreme poor.

The initiative calls for development support, collaboration with government ministries/departments, research institutions and private sectors could largely contribute to wider replication of the technology at home and abroad to combat food insecurity, hunger and malnourishment.

For more info:<http://practicalaction.org/turning-compost-into-food-2>

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