

Something Fishy, Something Good

A fried fish roadside café is helping a community eat well, and aspire to better livelihood opportunities.



a. Basti Allah Wali, Kot Addu, Taunsa Barrage
b. Muhammad Alam Mirani village, Guddu Barrage

Liaqat Hussain is a busy man. As the proprietor of a little roadside café that specializes in preparing fresh fish for its clientele, he is the go-to man for hundreds of people who visit Taunsa Barrage every day for recreational purposes. When we met him, he is getting a record of sales worth Rs. 100,000 computerized. This significant amount was earned over the winter holiday period when people eat fish the most. However, he remembers that it wasn't always this good for him.

A resident of Basti Allah Wali near Taunsa Barrage, Liaqat comes from a long line of fishermen. And as it was the case with most fishermen in his community, Liaqat also admits that he was involved in unsustainable fishing practices to earn just enough to support his family. This involved overfishing and using nets with a small mesh. The latter practice was doubly harmful as it resulted in even juvenile fish being caught, and the end result was lower catch for every fisherman in the area.

“It wasn't as if there wasn't enough fish to go around, just that we could all feel our share becoming smaller and smaller,” he admits.

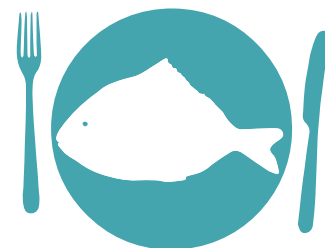
However, Liaqat was one of the lucky ones. His quest to find out why his livelihood was shrinking led him to become one of the pioneering supporters of WWF-Pakistan's work in the area. Initially, as part of the eco-tourism initiative, Liaqat was trained to give local and foreign visitors a guided tour of the ecologically rich area around Taunsa Barrage. It was this training that sensitized him about illegal fishing practices and the environmental degradation they caused. Fishermen needed their daily catch for livelihood, but the harmful way in which they conducted their work was further leading to economic destruction. It was also slowly chipping away at the environmental balance in his surroundings. He wanted to do something more to break free of the vicious cycle.

“I became a part of the CBO, Indus Welfare Foundation, in my area, which was started and registered with the help of the project team. I have been actively campaigning ever since,” he adds determinedly.

“The idea of a fried fish café didn't occur to me at all. But



Liaqat has managed to earn more than Rs.100,000 through his fried fish café that serves sustainably caught fish from the Indus.



Fried fish cafés are empowering fishermen to fish sustainably and then serve hygienic and delicious food to their patrons.

when the project team suggested it, I couldn't see a better way to link my ancestor's profession with a better livelihood opportunity. We catch fish anyway, why not prepare and sell it ourselves?"

The project team identified an ideal location for setting up the fried fish café, right next to the Taunsa Information Centre, under the shadow of the Taunsa Barrage. A simple set up with the necessities required to prepare the freshly caught fish was the first step. Starting out small, Liaqat only offered one variety of fish to his customers. As he kept adding more variety of fish dishes to the menu, the number of clientele kept growing as well. He started by earning a few hundred rupees and in the first quarter of 2014, his earnings were close to Rs. 80,000.

"The menu now includes fried fish, fish *kebab*, fish *kofta* and fish *pulao*," he proudly recites the menu. "People really love eating rice and fish together here!"

Once the customers started coming, Liaqat's entrepreneurial spirit also kicked in. Working closely with the project team, he further worked to get a deep freezer installed at his café which stocks soft beverages to accompany the delicious fish on offer. For children, he also has candies, biscuits and packs of chips. And while there are many fried fish stalls near the barrage, Liaqat is confident of the taste and quality of his establishment. Having been trained by the WWF-Pakistan staff about sustainable fishing practices, hygiene and health issues, Liaqat is adamant that he offers the most hygienically prepared fish in the area. His customers, local and foreign, agree.

Following in Liaqat's footsteps is Muhammad Ali, who has benefitted from a hike in his income by opening up a fried fish stall in Muhammad Alam Mirani village near Guddu Barrage. A jovial man who credits his initial success to the project staff, he has yet to match the wild success of Liaqat's stall, but he is hopeful that he will catch up when fishing season resumes. The initial income from the sale of his fried fish helped him earn Rs. 25, 000 per month – an amount which he wasn't expecting to get so early in his entrepreneurial venture.

Muhammad Ali is a member of the local CBO, Sindhu Mallah Goth Sudhar Tanzeem. He proudly follows the project



The concept of micro-economics is helping fishermen involved with fried fish cafés realize their potential beyond traditional wage labour.



Liaqat prepares his signature fried fish fresh for customers in his hygienic café located right next to the iconic Taunsa Barrage.

ideals of integrity, hard work and dedication. A simple innovation on an existing idea and nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit has led to the successful transformation of these simple fishermen into stable workers with a respectable income source. Their community members look up to them, and while not all want to get into the game of opening up a food stall, most agree that it is the sustainable fishing practices learnt via the project that have become the foundations upon which such delicious ideas stand.