

The fruits of labour



Abdul Jalil's patch of land has the abundance of vegetables – tomatoes, potatoes, gourds and more – that are always found in the gardens of RDRS' Group Members these days. But it stands out from those of his neighbours because it is also a fruit tree nursery, with mango, guava, lemon, lychee and other varieties, all of them special.

"What is so special about these fruit trees," he explains, "is that they are varieties of quality fruit trees not available here. I have fazli, lengra, gopalbhogh, six types of mango trees in all, and the same with the other fruit trees." These special trees yield fruit of a higher quality and in greater quantity than the more common local varieties where the harvest is a more hit-and-miss affair. Of course, these special trees are difficult to find and cost more to buy. Jalil got his from the Agricultural University, with which RDRS is working closely to improve agricultural output.

Jalil has these special trees in his nursery in Kathalbari because he, along with his wife and neighbours, is taking part in the "Mother Tree Orchard Project" run by RDRS in Kurigram, Nageswari and Rajarhat using funds from GTZ. An innovative project, it promises to be a profitable source income for those involved. Each member of the Orchard Group pays a small sum of money each month into an account with the Krishi (Farmers') Bank, for future investment.

Standing by his mango trees, now waist-high, Abdul Jalil says, "Once these trees grow a little bigger, we will take cuttings and graft them onto other trees in the locality. Those local fruit trees will then yield better quality mangoes, or lemons, or lychees, or whatever tree we are dealing with. These varieties of fruit are tastier but much costlier than the local variety. But as there is demand for them, we can sell the cuttings to local growers and not only earn a good income but also encourage the cultivation of good fruit in the area. I know it is going to be a good business."



As yet, Abdul Jalil isn't knowledgeable about grafting but he and others from the Orchard Group will soon attend useful training sessions. At present, he spends much of his time in the nursery, weeding the area, using fertiliser and applying pesticides when necessary. He and his wife, Shireen, who works beside him, obviously have the ability, however, as all of the 45 saplings they planted in the beginning have survived.