



CONVERSATIONS OF CHANGE

BANGLADESH



BANGLADESH

Agriculture provides the principle source of livelihood for more than 80% of its 170 million people, and is the backbone of the Bangladesh economy. The government acknowledges this in its strategy to 2041, with investment in research and extension. CDAIS began in 2015. At the outset, however, the need to also invest in strengthening functional capacities was not recognised by those used to the ‘traditional’ technology transfer model. The story of mango producers in Chapai Nawabganj district is offered here as an example, though CDAIS saw success with all three innovation niche partnerships (or ‘clusters’) it worked with. At organisational level, it is clear that the ‘new’ approach has gained some traction in key institutes involved in agricultural innovation, and that CDAIS tools and approaches have opened people’s eyes to a complementary form of long-term capacity development.

Changes in attitudes, and practices

“Before, we only thought of ourselves, but now we think as a group”, explained Md. Ismail Khan, mango farmer and Secretary of the Shibganj Mango Producers’ Cooperative Society Ltd. The President Md. Omar Ali continued: “With CDAIS, we came to understand the complexity of our situation. And together we identified our problems and those who could help us solve them. For example, we requested BAPA [Bangladesh Agro-Processors Association] to come and give us technical training, and explained to the DAE [Department of Agricultural Extension] the issues we had that were limiting export potential. The DAE officer came and vowed to support us in every way he could. We also asked the Deputy Commissioner to change the ‘maund weight’ for mangos that we considered unfair, and he did so! We would never have done these things without the confidence we gained from CDAIS.”

Chapai Nawabganj district is the centre of mango production in Bangladesh and, within the district, Shibganj upazila (sub-district) is the major producing area. “This upazila is the largest mango producing area in the country”, said the Upazila Agriculture Officer S.M. Aminuzzaman. “We have around 18,000 hectares of orchards and about 80% of our farmers grow mango, with some 95% of the working population involved in some way with the value chain.”



Md. Ismail Khan tying a bag to his mangoes.



CDAIS National Innovation Facilitator Md. Sorof Uddin (left) in the orchard of co-op member Md. Ibrahim Ajad, discussing prospects for the coming harvest.

But numerous organisational and functional capacity issues were limiting the possibilities for farmers to earn more, and as such it was selected as one of three CDAIS innovation niche partnerships in the country.

During the capacity needs assessment in 2017, the partnership identified the gaps – what skills needed strengthening – and training then focussed on these, as Rozana Wahab, Lead National Innovation Facilitator, explained: “We worked with the group on managing multi-stakeholder partnerships, and facilitated training from other organisations on group management,



The Shibganj Mango Producers' Cooperative Society Ltd. meet in one of their member's orchard with CDAIS facilitators and the local upazila (sub-district) agriculture officer to share current issues (in this case, irrigation) and future plans.

leadership and communication skills, networking, negotiation and gender awareness. These were then applied as we supported the partnership to develop a marketing strategy.”

“And in early 2018, the group decided that they wanted to form an association, but didn't know what type of organisation they wanted”, said National Innovation Facilitator Md. Sorof Uddin. “Six months later they had agreed what they wanted and we then supported the process. The road was long, but the Shibganj Mango Producers' Cooperative Society was formally registered on 24 March 2019. And, as Khan explained, “this would never have happened without CDAIS. The group would not even have consolidated, let alone become registered. This is a huge achievement for us.”

“Thanks to CDAIS, our thinking changed, from ‘me’ to ‘we’.”

Saif Uddin Ahmed farmer from Char Ghagra, Mymensingh

“CDAIS helped us in so many ways”, said Khan. “The marketplace was amazing for us, to meet with support service providers, and the policy dialogue where we shared our problems in accessing export markets at the highest level. But the most valuable was the exposure visit to Thailand.” CDAIS helped to organise a visit in March 2019 for four members of the cooperative, the CDAIS facilitator, the Upazila Agriculture Officer and a private sector representative, to mango producers, markets and related government services in two provinces in Thailand. Aminuzzaman elaborated: “We saw how they spray only two or three times a year where some farmers here spray more than ten times, how they harvest using special tools, how they process green mangoes, and how they use paper bags like Dr Sorof has helped to introduce here.”

Mango bagging is a real innovation in Bangladesh, promoted by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, as Sorof Uddin explained: “Tied around the growing mangoes 40 days after fruit set, they improve fruit quality with a 50% increase in sale price, and reduce the need for pesticides against fruit flies and anthracnose disease by 30–70%. I first tried this in 2008, but the bags were not resistant to our heavy rains. Then during a visit to China in 2010 I found a source of better bags that would last at least two seasons, and the practice spread as farmers saw the



Co-op members discuss progress of their new office building and packhouse, alongside one of the group's orchards.



Members of the Shibganj Mango Producers' Cooperative Society Ltd. in front of their banner, with Secretary Md. Ismail Khan proudly showing their formal certificate, seated next to President Md. Omar Ali.

benefits. In 2016, 3.2 million bags were sold nationwide, increasing to 27.5 million in 2017, and 80 million in 2018, of which 60 million were sold in Shibganj alone. I hope that in five years we will see half of all producers using this simple technology that enhances the economic, environmental and health benefits to farmers and consumers alike.”

The road forward for the co-op

“Being a registered cooperative gives us so many more opportunities”, said Ali. “We are now building an office and store, have leased five hectares to plant a new variety that fruits year-round, and are looking for donors and investors to help us expand into mango processing. We also aim to improve our marketing by branding with our cooperative logo, and to start exporting through links with Swiss Contact and Solidaridad.” Group member Md. Mostafizur Rahman added, “In the future, we also want more people to become involved, men and women, and to become an umbrella organisation including other unions. Together we can learn more and earn more, and hopefully expand to more than 100 members by next year.”

“The changes are so clear. At the beginning only five or six would turn up to meetings and no one would want to talk, but now only one or two will be missing and you can't stop them talking! They are so much more confident in sharing their thoughts and ideas.”

Mojammal Haque assistant National Innovation Facilitator

“And we especially thank Sorof Uddin [CDAIS facilitator], who has guided and supported us all along our journey, and is now also a good friend”, concluded Ali. What also surely helped is that as well as being a senior scientist who specialises in mango research, he is also a mango producer himself and comes from the same area.

Learning from CDAIS

Those involved in CDAIS activities in Bangladesh all stated how much they have learnt, with much being new to them, as confirmed in the evaluation of acquired skills in March 2019.

“The concepts and tools introduced in the facilitator training were like a breath of fresh air, and the capacity needs assessment gave me a chance to really hear the marketing challenges that our farmers face. The CDAIS approach also helped develop my own skills and confidence as a facilitator, which I will continue to use in other aspects of my work.”

Fatema ‘Shila’ Wadud, National Innovation Facilitator, Department of Agricultural Marketing

“The partnerships are such effective platforms for different groups of people to work together, and for ‘learning by doing’ using participatory tools. I was part of the learning process, but importantly, I got to understand what ‘innovation support systems’ are and how to develop the capacity of organisations to improve the services they offer. The functional skills I have learnt help me to facilitate meetings and workshops, and in my research work and project implementation.”

Salah Uddin Ibne Syed, National Innovation Facilitator (organisations), Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development (BARD)

“I have understood how soft skills can strengthen farmers’ capacities through training and workshops and working together, and how these acquired capacities will help them down the road. I will now use soft skills training and implement CDAIS approaches in other development projects I work on.”

Salahuddin Ahmed, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning focal point, Ascend International

“Through CDAIS I have enhanced my own functional communication and sharing skills, and learnt how to facilitate meetings and engage with farmers and other stakeholders. These soft skills were acquired from my participation in different

activities such as coaching plan evaluations, and reflection and refinement workshops, and I gained extra experiences from the other two partnerships. These and other skills I now use in my personal and professional life.”

Parvez Chowdhury, National Innovation Facilitator, Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI)

“I have built my confidence and competence for fulfilling our goals using new tools like visioning, the problem tree, coaching plan, reflection, and progress markers for monitoring. Especially interesting were multi-stakeholder partnerships, participatory decision making and conflict resolution. And as a project leader in value chains, I have ample opportunities to use these new skills in other areas of my work.”

Md. Jamal Uddin, National Innovation Facilitator, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)

“I have learnt many new ideas from CDAIS that I shared with others in my organisation [a national NGO]. And after discussing with senior management, I will use these new training methods to teach these new skills to more farmers.”

Medu Aong Marma, assistant National Innovation Facilitator, CCDB (local NGO)

“Through my involvement in the whole range of CDAIS activities, I have learnt new tools and methods, and had the opportunity to listen to many people, especially other service providers. I now appreciate the value of functional capacities, used these skills when helping farmers to form their producers’ cooperative, and am applying them in other aspects of my work.”

Md. Sorof Uddin, National Innovation Facilitator, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)

“Learning about the value of working together in platforms and partnerships was very useful for me, and I will certainly use this approach when I work with farmers again.”

Mojammal Haque, assistant National Innovation Facilitator, CCDB (local NGO)

Strengthening capacities of service providers

Part of the CDAIS approach is to work with key innovation support service providers. All three partnerships identified marketing and processing as particular challenges, so the Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM), Bangladesh Agro-Processors Association (BAPA) and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) were invited to work with the CDAIS team to identify capacity gaps, develop a vision, and set priority objectives to become more effective and responsive service providers. Staff considered the status of their organisations related to their mandates and farmer expectations, analysed their capacities to organise and deliver, and developed action plans with a vision, priority objectives, actors of change and progress markers.

“Through this process we got to understand the weaknesses of our organisation, and though making changes is not easy, it is happening, little by little”, explained Baktear Hossain, National Project Coordinator and Principal Scientific Officer at BARC. “New ideas are being presented at our monthly meetings, and I see people thinking differently. For example, we are considering functional capacity training from next year [2020], and there is a plan to broaden the National Technology Transfer Coordination Committee that BARC leads. Until now this only concerns crop production, but we now see the added value from including fisheries and livestock, as well as agro-processors, farmer representatives and other actors. I also see changes in DAM and BAPA, who are now proposing farmer-friendly and market-focused activities to better integrate innovation into new and ongoing projects.”

Neena Shahnaz Begum, Deputy Director at DAM said, “through the CDAIS workshops we learnt our strengths and our weaknesses, and how to develop the services we offer through building capacity and new partnerships which we will now apply.” DAM Director General Mohammed Yousuf added, “and we need to improve organisational skills, of our farmers so they can get a fair price for their produce, and of our organisation. We are recruiting new staff; we will now ensure they benefit from soft skills training.”

Salah Uddin Ibne Syed, National Innovation Facilitator for organisational strengthening, added: “together they found new dimensions to cooperate, relate and organise,



Neena Shahnaz Begum and other staff from the Department of Agricultural Marketing developing the capacity to collaborate during an organisational training course in March 2019.

and I have seen how they have developed their functional skills, and a new culture of sharing and learning. I also see changes up to national level, with the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives introducing a new policy in November 2018 supporting agricultural production through cooperatives.”

Policy dialogues

To achieve sector transformation for agricultural innovation requires a shift in focus from reactive problem solving to engagement and dialogue, and CDAIS also focused on developing capacities at the grass roots to engage in strategic and political processes. District-level policy

dialogues were held between sector stakeholders and senior officials to sensitise the officials on policy issues that constrain innovation, leading to agreements on actions to address those that could be dealt with at the local level. Unresolved challenges were then presented to policy makers and public and private sector stakeholders for discussion at a national policy dialogue in September

2018. “At the last policy event I attended, I witnessed how farmers expressed themselves so clearly and confidently in front of policy and decision makers”, explained Manfred Fernholz of the EU Delegation to Bangladesh. “I was gladly impressed listening to their simple, genuine and convincing words and not prepared speeches. They are indeed empowered.”

Innovation partnerships in Bangladesh



Mango

Facilitators: Mohammad Sorof Uddin, Mojamal Haque (assistant)

Mango is an important cash crop in Chapai Nawabganj district, and Shibganj upazila (sub-district) contributes more than half of the output. However, producers there were frustrated by limited market opportunities. Following CDAIS training on organisational development, and on leadership and management skills, a group of mango growers had the confidence and competence to form the Shibganj Mango Producers' Cooperative Society Ltd, now regarded as a focal organisation consulted by the upazila administration. Members participated in the district policy dialogue and highlighted their concern over the higher unit weight for mango sales. This was taken up by the District Commissioner who announced that the unit selling weight for mangoes must be reduced from 48 kg to 40 kg throughout the district from 2019. CDAIS also facilitated a group of mango farmers and government research and marketing staff to go on a learning visit to Thailand where they saw how the mango value chain there is supported to increase returns to growers.



Farmed fish

Facilitators: Parvez Chowdhury, Rathan Sana (assistant)

Mymensingh district produces 40% of all farmed fish nationally, with most activity centred on Trishal upazila. Commercial fish culture started here in the 1990s and expanded rapidly with quality fry and feed, a favourable

enabling environment, and market linkages, before stakeholders highlighted production and marketing challenges. CDAIS involved specialised organisations to facilitate training for fish farmers on organisational development and leadership and management skills, and 20 made the most of this training and formed the Mymensingh Fish Farmers' Foundation. A local hatchery owner provided them with office space, they opened a bank account, and submitted the relevant documents for registering their organisation. The group has been able to utilise skills gained from training on marketing and business development to negotiate an increase in the selling price of their fish of more than 50%.



Pineapple

Facilitators: Mohammed Jamal Uddin, Medu Aong Marma (assistant)

Demand for pineapple is increasing but marketing constraints persist for producers in Bandarban district, due to limited market access, production gluts, poor bargaining strength of farmers, high transport costs, and post-harvest losses. Technical and entrepreneurship training followed the development of new linkages through CDAIS, and farmers appreciated the need to upgrade their soft skills and to work together to resolve the challenges they faced. An exposure visit for Bandarban farmers, a Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) researcher and a district agriculture official to meet the pineapple growers' association at the centre of Indian pineapple growing and trading in Kerala allowed them to see innovative production and marketing practices first hand and talk to key stakeholders. This encouraged farmers to form their own cooperative, establishing the Bandarban Pineapple Growers' Association, and its members are now developing ideas for adding value to their produce.

Key lessons learnt

“The CDAIS concept is supportive to the government’s agricultural development plan and future strategy”, explains Anil Kumar Das, CDAIS Country Project Manager. “This is because it is encouraging farmers and cooperatives to access the free services from various government agencies and service providers, but that too few are aware is available. And whereas CDAIS worked with only some 200 farming families in this pilot project, we see the examples of success, and can now begin to scale this up. But with 40 million family farmers in Bangladesh, this will require lots of effort and support. And we have policies in place, but what we need are guidelines on how to effectively implement them.”

“An important tool was the CDAIS coaching plan”, explained Wahab. “This encouraged the facilitators to take ownership of the partnerships they work with, but not as drivers, and never dictating. It was the farmers who drove the process, and this has not been seen in Bangladesh before. This was the real beauty of CDAIS. The project concentrated on ‘people power’, encouraging the farmers to take control.” Das agreed, adding, “within the partnerships, leadership skills were developed, with exposure visits being especially important in building their confidence.”

“A crucial reason for the successes we witnessed is the willingness to try new things, initially by the National Innovation Facilitators, and to trust the project leaders”, said Claire Coote, Agrinatura Focal Person. “In turn, they passed this enthusiasm, integrity and commitment on to the communities and organisations they worked with so that stakeholders felt supported. This has created so much positivity. I hope that these attributes will continue to be passed on, so that people continue to believe that with the right skills and working together they can achieve their visions and objectives.”

And the next steps? “CDAIS is different from other projects and has proved itself on the field level”, said Dr Md. Kabir Iqramul Haque, Executive Chairman of BARC. “But it now needs to be disseminated through the Department of Agricultural Extension, and government departments need to work more closely with each other, especially on market links and channels”, a view shared by many in the project team. “It is important to showcase how the [CDAIS] approach had led to increased capacities and confidence, and how this leads to increased incomes”, added Fernholz.

The project concluded with a National Forum in April 2019, where farmers and facilitators from the three innovation niche partnerships, innovation support service providers and the project team shared their experiences in front of more than 70 participants including many senior officials. Nur Khondaker, FAO CDAIS Focal Person concluded, “We see the results and successes today. CDAIS has changed people, and given them a voice at policy level by forging links between farmers and the government. And we will strengthen the National Technical Committee as a platform to continue this work.”

“Development must be sustainable; though tractors and tools last a few years, human capacities last forever.”

Manfred Fernholz Team Leader, Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Development, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh

This story of results from the work of the CDAIS Bangladesh country team is based on interviews with them, CDAIS National Innovation Facilitators and various other partners.

Anil Kumar Das (FAO) – Country Project Manager; Baktear Hossain (BARC) – National Project Coordinator; Claire Coote (Natural Resources Institute) – Agrinatura Focal Person; Rozana Wahab (Ascend International) – Lead National Innovation Facilitator; Nur Khondaker (FAO Bangladesh) – FAO CDAIS Bangladesh Focal Person; Karin Nichterlein – FAO HQ Technical Officer Support; Interviews – Nick Pasiecznik (iCRA); Photographs – Nick Pasiecznik/CDAIS unless otherwise stated.

See also: *New markets for mangoes* (Wahab, R., Sorof Uddin, M.). pp 46–51, in: Agrinatura and FAO. 2018. *Building Competence and Confidence in Agricultural Innovation Systems. Stories of Change*. Agrinatura, Paris, and FAO, Rome. 196 pp.

CDAIS is implemented in Bangladesh by Agrinatura, represented by the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), University of Greenwich, FAO Bangladesh, and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), in partnership with other institutions depending on the innovation partnership under consideration.



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



This project was implemented with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union. © 2019