

BANGLADESH

NEW MARKETS FOR MANGOES

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“We must work together to increase mango production”

“We realised that we need to work together, and are now seeing changes happen,” said Omar Ali, President of the newly formed Shibganj Mango Association. Farmers and orchard owners saw the need to change when interest in mango production grew after exports to the EU started in 2015. With technical assistance from several initiatives, the first 12 registered farmers began to follow ‘good agricultural practices’. They formed an association now with more than 50 members, and CDAIS is supporting them to strengthen their organisation and to achieve their goals by building functional capacities.



Ismail Khan proudly showing off his mangoes.

“Even with a new market and increased demand for our mangoes, we were not able to capitalise on this opportunity,” explained Ismail Khan, a young farmer who is pioneering mango exports in Bangladesh. “But thanks to CDAIS, we realised that we needed to learn how to engage in strategic and political processes.” He added, “and the capacity needs assessment workshop helped us to see the bigger picture and understand that stakeholder partnerships are very important in addressing our production and marketing constraints.”

There was also a lack of collaboration among various government departments and other actors in the mango value chain that added to the difficulties faced by farmers. Together, they decided that to increase exports, they must work together to solve the issues. And CDAIS arrived at the right time, and is offering just the right sort of support that they need.

“After the CDAIS workshop, we understood that technical skills are not enough to sustain our business. We also need to build our functional skills to do well in farming.”

Ismail Khan Farmer, Shibganj

Mangoes in Shibganj

Bangladesh is the eighth largest mango-producing country in the world. In 2014–2015, 10 million tonnes of fruit was produced, of which 1.5 million tonnes were mangoes. Due to the nutritional value and their popularity, mangoes are considered as a high priority for national food security. They are also an important commodity crop, and production has increased considerably in recent years due to multi-cropping.

Production is concentrated in certain areas, and in the 2015–16 growing season almost half of all production came from just two districts, Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj. In the latter, mango is one of the most important cash crops, and in Shibganj sub-district (upazilla), most people are involved in mango production and trade, with 13,500 hectares producing 120,000 tonnes annually. The combination of many varieties means that there



Mangoes are a very important cash crop for many Bangladeshi farmers.

is supply throughout the whole season from mid-May to the end of September. Many orchards are more than 100 years old, but farmers had not organised themselves into groups to consider their interests.

The CDAIS approach

CDAIS activities in the area began with the identification of producer organisations and their capabilities, along with other institutions supporting agricultural innovation. Implementation of CDAIS started with the training of national innovation facilitators in the importance of innovation and capacity development, how to use different capacity needs assessment tools and methodologies, and how to develop action plans with producer groups.

Immediate impacts of the CDAIS workshop

Government officials at the capacity needs assessment workshop explained their responsibilities. Then one farmer reported that a trader had not been paying him for a year. The official who issues licences immediately called the trader, and the very next day the farmer received the first instalment. The benefits of a multi-stakeholder platform were instantly exemplified.

A second issue showed the added value from working together. The introduction of fruit bagging from 2012 had improved fruit quality and reduced pesticide use by preventing attacks from fruit flies and diseases that would otherwise damage the skin.

Using the innovative tools of CDAIS

During the capacity needs assessment, exercises were used that helped farmers evaluate their position. These included the timeline tool, the problem-and-solution tree, net mapping, visioning and action planning, and CDAIS supported farmers in learning how to navigate complexity, developing their capacity to collaborate, and improving their ability to reflect and learn. The timeline tool provided information on historical events from 2000 to 2016 related to mango production and trade in the area. The problem-and-solution tree exercise drew out key problems faced by farmers, and possible solutions. Ongoing instabilities identified in the mango sector included low yields, pests and diseases, irrigation and transport problems, the high costs of fertilizers, pesticides and labour, lack of knowledge on modern cultivation technology, few processing plants, and poor marketing linkages.



The exercises used in the capacity needs assessment workshop proved invaluable in helping farmers to identify their problems – and possible solutions.

Sharing stories: motivating farmers to set up a multi-stakeholder platform

To overcome some reticence on the part of farmers in Shibganj, CDAIS called representatives from another group that was already successful, and asked them to share their experiences. Mohammad Mojammel, Secretary General of the Bholahat Mango Foundation came and addressed farmers, unions, non-governmental organisations and agricultural extension and marketing officers. He told how the foundation had been formed, developed into a dynamic group and started to deliver visible benefits. The presentation had the desired effect, and inspired farmers and other stakeholders to create a ‘mango farmers platform’. “And after the workshop, we understood the need to work together, and gathered 300 farmers to form a platform so their voices can be heard,” said Omar Ali, President of the newly formed Shibganj Mango Association.

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Omar Ali President of the Shibganj Mango Association

But, due to the high cost of bags and the extra time required to attach them, most farmers had not adopted the technology. Also, the prices farmers received for their bagged fruit even dropped in some cases due to false rumours that it negatively affected fruit quality.

The problem became more serious in 2017 when the national quarantine department restricted exports and farmers and registered firms faced heavy losses.

But hope was not lost thanks to the CDAIS workshop, which helped all the stakeholders to learn about how to manage such issues strategically and politically. And now, communications are opening up with the quarantine department to solve the problems preventing exports.

“And the Bangladesh mango value chain needs to be strengthened,” said Mr Shamim, General Secretary of the mango platform. “We need dedicated mango marketplaces



The 'bagging' of mangoes before they mature improves quality and reduces the use of pesticides.



Md. Ismail Khan showing he is proud to be involved in this initiative.

in suitable locations, the replacement of traditional balances by digital scales to improve trust, and the building of new storage and packing facilities to reduce post-harvest losses. And after this was made clear during the workshop, we then went straight to the District Commissioner's Office to change the weighing system, and applied for land for a new marketplace."

Ways forward

However, some of the key problems identified in the Shibganj mango workshop require longer-term efforts to ensure the development of sustainable production and marketing systems. Specific technical solutions include the introduction of new varieties, improved irrigation and pest and disease control, better administration and a more organised labour supply.

But it is acknowledged that achieving these technical solutions will require the development of new skills – soft skills, functional skills – that will allow stakeholders to build partnerships and take the necessary steps. With support from CDAIS, farmers have developed a coaching plan to help them achieve their aims of producing and selling more mangoes, to strengthen the mango multi-stakeholder platform, and to ensure the sustainable and diversified marketing of their produce. And, as Omar Ali, President of the new mango platform confirmed, "we are confident that what we have learnt through CDAIS will help us improve production, exports and farm incomes."

Prepared by

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Mango is one of five innovation partnerships in Bangladesh, identified during the scoping study of the CDAIS project. For more information, visit <https://cdais.net/home/pilots-countries/bangladesh-3>. CDAIS is implemented in Bangladesh by Agrinatura (represented by NRI), FAO Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, in partnership with other institutions, depending on the innovation partnership.

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