

# Status of Agricultural Extension Services in South West Bangladesh

## Opportunities and Challenges

### Introduction

Agricultural production has contributed 13.65% of the national GDP of Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>. The country has already achieved considerable success increasing production of rice, vegetables, aquaculture, poultry and eggs that has increased income and helped reduce the burden of hunger and malnutrition<sup>2</sup>. But, to meet growing demand, increased production is necessary. This is particularly true in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh which is subject to many natural and man-made challenges. The area is frequently hit with cyclones, tidal surges, floods, and droughts. Increased soil salinity, waterlogging and the conversion of too much cultivable land into shrimp farms has made life difficult for

*Traditional cropping patterns are highly recommended to be transformed to a more effective and climate specific one for country's coastal regions. Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) is playing an important role to provide efficient, effective, decentralized, location specific, demand responsive and integrated extension services to the farmer regarding sustainable and profitable crop production.*



<sup>1</sup> See Sectoral Share of GDP at Constant Prices, 2018-19, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, <http://bbs.portal.gov.bd>

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh First Progress Report 2018, General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, December 2018, Page-49

farmers. As a result, many families struggle to put nutritious food on the table and too many children are malnourished.

Since 2015, USAID's Nobo Jatra project, implemented by World Vision Bangladesh has sought to improve the food security, nutrition and resilience of vulnerable communities, especially children, in the Khulna and Satkhira districts of south west Bangladesh through a set of multi-sectoral interventions, including climate smart agriculture. To achieve the goal, Nobo Jatra is facilitating World Vision's social accountability approach named Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), community people and civil society to improve farmers' access to government extension services and inputs.

## Key Recommendations

- Recruitment of Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers to fill vacant positions at Union level to provide necessary services to farmers. Duty rosters and duration of service hours to be strongly maintained; Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers to ensure availability of mandated services from the union center and through scheduled field visits.
- Union Parishad to provide a separate room for the Union Agricultural Service Unit and support to furnish the room with essential equipment in coordination with Ministry of Agriculture. Establish and maintain a digital lab, in coordination with to provide information to farmers about seeds, crops, pest control and sales of produce.
- Zila Parishad (District Council) lease canals and ponds for commercial purposes. Canals need to be lease free and have sweet water for irrigation. Stronger monitoring of canals and ponds by district and sub district administration to ensure that they are lease free and available to marginal farmers for sustainable aquaculture.
- Strengthened feedback and monitoring mechanism so that farmers can get quality seed and fertilizers from the dealers/retailers as per government rates.
- Interventions at union level to promote production and use of organic fertilizers, training and sensitization on saline tolerate species to farmers. Circulation of SBC materials to farmers in the form of leaflets, to increase knowledge on how to cultivate pesticide free crops.

## Method and Process

As part of the CVA process, the project organized one initial meeting in Khulna where the monitoring standards for Union Agricultural Service Unit (UASU) was identified in the presence of the divisional, district and upazila officials of Government departments on agriculture. Four meetings were organized in four sub-districts with stakeholders to sensitize them on CVA process as well as the standards for Union Agricultural Service Unit. 40 monitoring standard sessions were facilitated in 2018 with the Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers and Union Agricultural Committee members to understand the present situation of the service unit. Four scorecard sessions were facilitated for each Union Agricultural Service Unit with four different farmers' groups and members of Union Parishads.

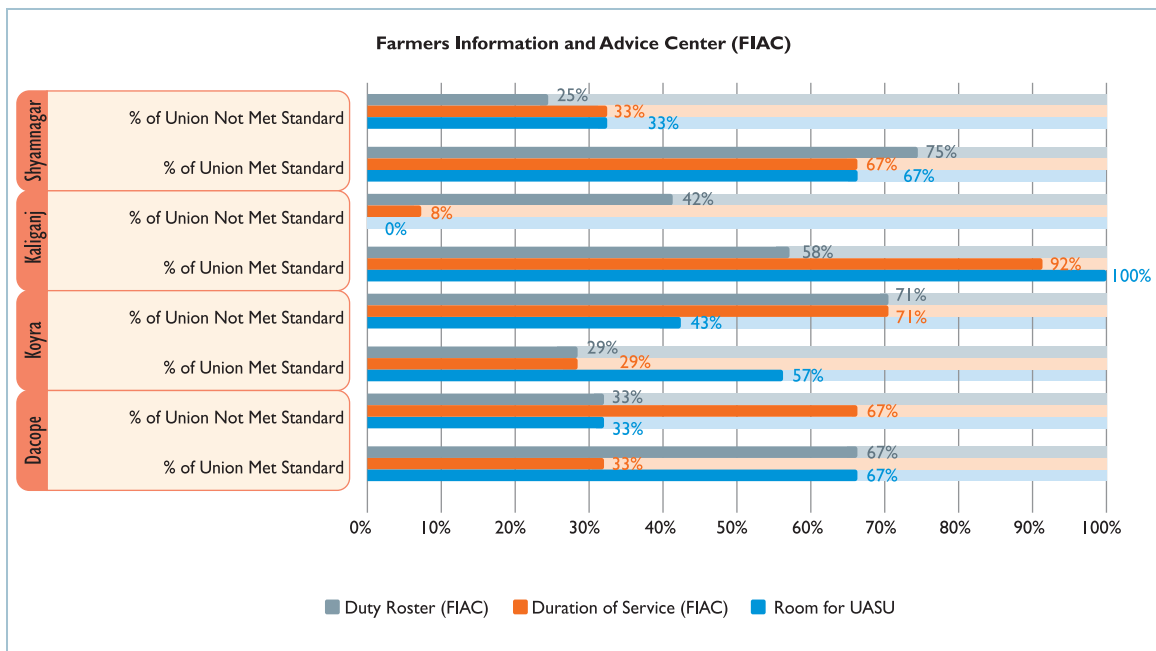
## Key Findings

- Farmers get valuable technical advice from Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers for better agricultural production and pest control.
- In the majority of unions there are separate rooms for Union Agriculture Services Unit (UASU), - 67% unions in Dacope, 57% in Koyra, 100% in Kaliganj and 67% in Shyamnagar.
- Services are not regularly available and majority Union Agricultural Service Units in Dacope (33%) and Koyra (29%) have not met the standards of three days per week from these centers; on the contrary, 67% units in Shyamnagar and 92% in Kaliganj have met the standard.
- Around 90% of the Union Agricultural Service Units in four upazilas have seasonal plans.
- Developing and maintaining fortnightly plans aligning with the seasonal plan is a challenge because of shortage of human resources. 78% UASU of Dacope, 58% UASU of Kaliganj and 67% UASU of Shyamnagar met the standard of fortnight plan.
- 83% unions in Kaliganj and 75% in Shyamnagar are having regular meetings of Union Agricultural Committees whereas 56% Unions in Dacope and 43% in Koyra did not meet this standard. Regular meetings of the committees are essential to discuss progress and challenges, so that, members can raise concerns to the upper tier of administration (from union to upazila level).
- Farmer groups and members of Union Parishad, during the scorecard sessions, mostly scored average and below average against selected indicators. This is an indication that participants are not happy with the services. The indicator, 'service by Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers' (four days per week at block and union level) received an average score 2.91, but the 'field visit and services by SAAO' scored bad (1.85), which indicates that improvement is required.

### World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action Approach

The information and recommendations in this brief are drawn largely from the data and opinions gathered by communities themselves in Khulna and Satkhira districts. World Vision equips communities to monitor the provision of basic services using its social accountability approach named "Citizen Voice and Action". The data on community-led monitoring of union agricultural extension services referenced in this brief has been generated by communities across the 40 unions of project working sub-districts.





## Challenges

- There is lot of vacancy of Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers in four sub-districts; because 39 unions out of 40 did not meet the standard.
- Agricultural services provided from the centers in Union Parishads are not satisfactory and there is significant absence of field visits by staff at 'block level' (or within their catchment area) to support farmers.
- With regard to field visit and services most of the Agricultural Service Units at union level in Dacope (56%), Kaliganj (75%), Shyamnagar (67%), and Koyra (100%) Upazila have not met the standards. There is a need to address this lack of service providers, service rooms and digital labs at union parishad level.
- Meeting the standard regarding 'scheduled days and time' has gaps between plan and execution. Majority of Union Agricultural Service Units have not met the standards of three days per week services from these centers.
- Shortage of human resources results in a growing difficulty of developing and maintaining the fortnight plan aligning with the seasonal plan.

*We are trying to cultivate vegetable in homestead but we face problem due to water crises and lack of technical knowledge. So, agricultural club for women can be formed by SAAO and they can train the female farmers on homestead gardening.*  
*- A woman farmer, in the Divisional Dialogue on Improvement of Union Agricultural Service Unit on 8 January 2020 in Khulna*



## Areas of further improvement

- Field visits by staff to their respective catchment areas needs to be monitored to allow for actions to improve the current situation. The limited number of field visits is significant and directly affects farmers in terms of getting necessary supports from Union Agriculture Services Unit.
- Lack of human resources, service rooms in union parishads and lack of digital labs are the main causes reduced service provision, hence, these should be considered as areas that need significant improvement.
- Absence of three Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers per union is very high in 39 unions out of 40 unions, as shown in monitoring standard data. This existing lacking needs due importance to improve the services.
- More attention is required to meet the standard regarding embedded/technical services as per scheduled days and time.



- Upazila administration should focus on the regularity of the scheduled meeting of the committee with high importance as these meetings are critical to know work progress as well as challenges so that the raised issues can be taken to upper level for the necessary support to ensure better production across the unions.
- Findings from score card sessions should be reached to the respective officials of Union Agriculture Services Unit and work plan should be developed accordingly.

## Concluding remarks

Strengthening adaptation capacity requires blending individual skills and household capacity with external institutional supports. Largely, farming communities in southwest Bangladesh have been following traditional cropping patterns for crop cultivation. In this situation, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) is playing an important role to provide efficient, effective, decentralized, location specific, demand responsive and integrated extension services to farmers regarding sustainable and profitable crop production. The department is providing the extension services to grass root farmers through agricultural experts at district and upazila level as well as extension workers at the union levels. Addressing the gaps mentioned in CVA score card session and taking necessary measures to minimize those would certainly be an effective solution towards shifting to saline resilient agricultural practices

Agricultural development is the most fundamental factor to ensure food security of any country. Department of Agriculture Extension, Government of Bangladesh, has a major role to play towards this development. Such commitments were affirmed by decision makers in Government during the 'Divisional Dialogue on Improvement of Union Agricultural Service Unit' on 8 January 2020 in Khulna. A government representative noted that 50-60% staff (SAAO) positions are vacant, a recruitment process is going on; there are no sitting arrangements for the officers at Union level, it is hoped that Upazila Chairmen will put attention to create the space. Upazila parishad can play an important role to free the canals that can be used by the farmers for irrigation. The Nobo Jatra project will continue consultation and follow up with the regional DAE office, Upazila and Union Parishad to achieve the commitments set in the regional dialogue.

This policy brief has been developed based on the data resulting from monitoring standards and community's participation organized by USAID's Nobo Jatra Project. Research by- **Rubayat Ahsan** and **Nirmal Sarker**, Research assistants - **Mandira Guha Neogi** & **Faima Rahman**, Information collection at field level- **Amos Murmu** and **Stephen Hembrom**, Idea and Editing- **Mohammed Norul Alam Raju** and **Saeqah Kabir**

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For Further Communication- **Rakesh Katal**, Chief of Party, Nobo Jatra Project, World Vision Bangladesh, Abedin Tower (2nd Floor), 35 Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Banani, Dhaka-1213