

Bangladesh RIU Country Assessment Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Context

Uniquely for a country with a vulnerable ecology, Bangladesh has established a creditable record of sustained economic growth (6% annually). Bangladesh is 'on track' to meet most of the MDG targets. Those which may not be reached include income poverty reduction and maternal and under-five mortality. Over 70 million people in Bangladesh are classified as income poor with 20% of the population in the poorest category. Three-quarters of the country's population and 85% of the poor live and earn their livelihood in the rural areas. The vast majority of these are simultaneously engaged in crop production, fishing, aquaculture, horticulture and various forms of livestock rearing. The agricultural sector is gradually changing from a subsistence production system towards cash cropping, whereby a substantial part of the produce is marketed. Agriculture generates two-thirds of total employment, contributes 25% of GDP, 25% of total export earnings and provides food security for the increasing population. The following sectors contribute to the agricultural Gross National Product (GNP): crops-71%, forestry-10%, fisheries-10%, and livestock-9%. MDG attainment will require that all routes out of poverty must be pursued – economic growth, continued NGO contributions, increased involvement of the private sector, community action and improved governance and state service delivery – with a strong focus on the agriculture/NR sectors and rural areas of Bangladesh. There has been a significant improvement in the political environment in Bangladesh under the current caretaker government. But new elections are likely to be held in the near future.

Criteria

A comprehensive assessment of the range of NR opportunities available in Bangladesh which address the needs of the poor and which fit RIU principles and purpose was made by the team based on several key criteria.

These included:

- numbers of poor whose livelihoods can be measurably changed by adoption of RNRRS technologies through RIU intervention in 3-4 years;
- existence of relevant and validated RNRRS knowledge and outputs; existence of additional outputs that would add value to RNRRS outputs;
- links to national poverty reduction strategies and MDG fulfilment;
- degree of sustainability after the RIUP through developing ongoing innovation processes which can be used by farmers to continue to respond to new opportunities and challenges;
- opportunities for learning and sharing lessons.

Process

During the assessment, the team held discussions with more than 80 people across all relevant sectors (government, public research, private sector, NGO, INGO, policy, communication and media as well as agriculture, fisheries, horticulture and livestock) and also with farmer and fisher groups. Field trips were made to Rajshahi district in the HBT, the recommended location for the rice-based opportunity, and to Mymensingh and Jessore/Narail for the fisheries-based opportunities. The assessment team therefore feels confident that the following recommendations for RIU engagement in Bangladesh are demand-driven, locally and nationally owned and highly relevant to national poverty reduction strategies. Then an assessment was made of the existing innovation systems: past innovations and current trends, key actors involved in bringing these about who could be potential partners. The advantages and disadvantages or risks associated with the opportunity, and the potential RIUP outputs that will result were also considered. The advantages and disadvantages or risks associated with the opportunity and the potential RIUP outputs that would result were then considered. A budget was suggested for each opportunity with a total budget for Bangladesh of £4.5 million over 4 years and a plan of action and timetable for the remainder of 2007.

Priority Opportunities

Four priority opportunities for RIU engagement were identified, two of which are in the fisheries sector. These opportunities both address the needs of the poor and fit RIU purpose and principles and include:

- *Rice-based innovation system:* Improving the productivity of rice-based systems in the High Barind Tract for food security and poverty reduction
- *Fisheries innovations systems:*
 - a. Community-based fisheries innovation system: promotion of community-based integrated fisheries management (IFM) strategies for poverty reduction
 - b. *Agro-aquaculture innovation system:* promotion of innovations in agro-aquaculture (AA) systems for poverty reduction
- *Communication innovations system:* Building capacity of communication actors and mechanisms to disseminate NR knowledge in Bangladesh

Other areas were identified where further investment by RIUP could contribute to its purpose and principles. These include: improved systems for quality seed production, a coalition approach in the poultry sector, improved livestock feed options, integration of vegetables for diversifying income and agricultural mechanization. Investment in these areas may best be integrated into the priority opportunities. Further assessment by experts is recommended.

Recommendations

The team also made five recommendations for further action by the management team which include

- supporting the four priority opportunities
- establishing a national hub in Bangladesh to facilitate smooth operation and national ownership of priority opportunities and outputs.

- consider investing in other opportunities (seed, poultry, livestock feed, vegetables and mechanization) with potential to be integrated into the priority opportunities to diversify income sources for the poor.
- further assess the opportunities and mechanisms for sharing NR knowledge generated by the priority opportunities and relevant NR knowledge held elsewhere both regionally and inter-regionally.
 - Opportunity 1: Rice-based system - Bangladesh, Nepal, India;
 - Opportunity 2: Fisheries-based systems - Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia;
 - Opportunity 3: Communication systems - potentially all countries.
- further investigations in Bangladesh to assess additional opportunities highlighted; contracting a livelihoods expert to assess the impact of the priority opportunities on livelihoods of the poor; and linking with the Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra-Poor through improved livestock feed options.

Other Issues

A new long-term programme to support and develop the private sector in Bangladesh has just been initiated. The Bangladesh Investment Climate Fund (BICF) aims to facilitate a growing and efficiently functioning private sector through an improved investment climate characterised by on-going processes of regulatory reform. It will foster an improved operating environment for businesses including SMEs including in agriculture and related sectors (fisheries and livestock), thus contributing to an enabling environment for the RIUP.

The current political environment, the exciting developments to support the growth and efficient functioning of the private sector through the BICF and the natural entrepreneurship of Bengalis provide a conducive and enabling environment for successful implementation and impact of the RIUP in Bangladesh. This situation further reinforces all of the above recommendations.

Next Steps for RIU

The RIU must follow up on the recommendation to identify a livelihood specialist to assess the opportunities immediately.

A livelihood specialist from Bangladesh or with extensive Bangladesh experience will be commissioned by the end of March to assess the opportunities and RIU will facilitate e-fora, video conferencing etc between the team members to discuss the four opportunities in terms of livelihood benefits and make recommendations on the opportunities.

The investment in establishing a national hub in Bangladesh and mechanisms for its establishment will be examined.

RIU validation workshops will be commissioned in April/May for each opportunity to bring together key actors in the system and to invite concept notes for taking the opportunities forward.

Full proposals will be invited by end of June for review by 1st October.

RNRRS Showcasing events for RNRRS technologies are proposed for the Aman season (late Sept-Oct 2007).

The political climate in Bangladesh will be monitored carefully since the parliamentary election was originally scheduled for January 22, but the caretaker government has postponed it indefinitely. That government declared a state of emergency and suspended the elections after months of crippling opposition protests demanding electoral reform. On Tuesday Feb 27th, the chief of the caretaker government, Fakhruddin Ahmed, said the vote cannot be held until democratic reforms are implemented.



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