

Toggle menu
Blue Gold Program Wiki

Navigation

- [Main page](#)
- [Recent changes](#)
- [Random page](#)
- [Help about MediaWiki](#)

Tools

- [What links here](#)
- [Related changes](#)
- [Special pages](#)
- [Permanent link](#)
- [Page information](#)

Personal tools

- [Log in](#)

personal-extra

Toggle search

Search

Random page

Views

- [View](#)
- [View source](#)
- [History](#)
- [PDF Export](#)

Actions

File:Final Report Covid-19 survey 3jun 21.pdf

From Blue Gold Program Wiki

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- [File](#)
- [File history](#)
- [File usage](#)

Blue Gold Program
Report on the COVID-19 Survey in BGP Polders
Final version - 3 June 2021

Introduction

The Blue Gold Program (BGP), implemented from 2013 to end 2021, aimed at improving the livelihoods in 22 coastal polders in Khulna, Satkhira and Patuakhali by rehabilitating water infrastructure as well as supporting Water Management Organisations (WMGs). This was complemented by enhancing agricultural development in order to benefit from the increased opportunities facilitated by improved water management. Inclusive development was strived for from the start of BGP, with a special focus on including poor households (through enhancing homestead production) and on women (through gender equality and women's empowerment). Towards the end of BGP there was increasing evidence that both poverty was reduced (due to increasing agricultural production of field crops and from homesteads) and women were more empowered. The latter was demonstrated in various ways, such as (i) economic empowerment through increased knowledge, increased access to inputs and markets, increased production and income; (ii) more confidence, joint decision-making and respect within the family and community, including increased social networks; and (iii) more women in leadership positions, in particular as WMG leaders. Though not explicitly targeted, also (some) reduction of domestic violence was reported.

The year 2020 brought two major disasters that impacted BGP beneficiaries, negating some achievements of the preceding period of BGP supported development: the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to be a threat; and the Cyclone Amphan, which hit several polders on May 20 and 21. Most impact of COVID-19 is related to the drastic measures that were imposed by the government in March 2020 to minimize infections by the virus. These measures included a lockdown, urging people to stay home and maintain social distancing. It meant that almost all transport was stopped and businesses, markets and educational institutions were closed. This had an immense impact on the communities in the BGP area as well as on individual persons. In order to get some insight in the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a special focus on women, a rapid survey was devised; the interviews were conducted in August and September 2020. Though the survey did not aim to assess the impact of the Amphan cyclone, it was found that the cyclone had aggravated some of Covid-19's negative effects. This report summarizes the findings from that survey.

Objective and methodology

The objective of the survey was to identify the impact of Covid-19 Blue Gold polders particularly on women, but also as compared to men. The survey also meant to explore to which extent WMG members were differently affected by Covid-19 than non-WMG members. The survey aimed to address various areas of Covid-19 impact, with emphasis on those areas relevant to BGP's interventions and BGP's objectives, such as food security, poverty reduction and gender equality.

Because face-to-face interviews were not possible due to lockdown measures, the survey was conducted by telephone calls by BGP's gender coordinator. In total 15 women were interviewed, who were purposely selected as resource persons with good insight in social development issues within their communities. 12 of them were members of Water Management Groups (WMGs), either general members or members of Executive Committees; 3 women respondents were female members of Union Parishads, the lowest level of local government in Bangladesh.

Go to page

Before the start of the survey a manual of topics had been developed in order for the interviewees to be able to identify the relevant information. The interviewees were asked to describe their current situation as well as to provide the requested data. In case of a lack of data, the manual of topics is a production and response and in the manual of the Amphan cyclone, the manual of the survey and the manual of the survey are provided to the field staff.

Before the findings are presented an effort is made to identify the relevant information.

1. **Access to information to support the survey**

Access to information is not only the most important information on Covid-19 but also the most important information on the impact of Covid-19 on the communities. The manual of topics is a production and response and in the manual of the Amphan cyclone, the manual of the survey and the manual of the survey are provided to the field staff.

2. **Information on the impact of Covid-19**

The general objectives of the survey are to identify the impact of Covid-19 on the communities in the BGP area as well as on individual persons. In order to get some insight in the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a special focus on women, a rapid survey was devised; the interviews were conducted in August and September 2020. Though the survey did not aim to assess the impact of the Amphan cyclone, it was found that the cyclone had aggravated some of Covid-19's negative effects. This report summarizes the findings from that survey.

3. **Objective and methodology**

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4. **Impact of Covid-19**

Because face-to-face interviews were not possible due to lockdown measures, the survey was conducted by telephone calls by BGP's gender coordinator. In total 15 women were interviewed, who were purposely selected as resource persons with good insight in social development issues within their communities. 12 of them were members of Water Management Groups (WMGs), either general members or members of Executive Committees; 3 women respondents were female members of Union Parishads, the lowest level of local government in Bangladesh.

[next page →](#)

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Report on the Covid-19 survey in BGP polders

Blue Gold Program

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Date/Time	Thumbnail	Dimensions	User	Comment
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current [15:41, 11 June 2021](#)



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pages (734 KB)

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Namespaces

- [File](#)
- [Discussion](#)

Variants

[Categories:](#)

- [Report](#)
- [Documents in English](#)

This page was last edited on 11 June 2021, at 15:42.

Blue Gold Program Wiki

The wiki version of the Lessons Learnt Report of the Blue Gold program, documents the experiences of a technical assistance (TA) team working in a development project implemented by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) over an eight+ year period from March 2013 to December 2021. The wiki lessons learnt report (LLR) is intended to complement the BWDB and DAE project completion reports (PCRs), with the aim of recording lessons learnt for use in the design and implementation of future interventions in the coastal zone.

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