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32 Agricultural Extension Methods and Communication

From Blue Gold Program Wiki

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Communication aimed at beneficiaries[[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

Briefing Materials



The following materials illustrate concepts, interventions, outcomes and lessons learnt, including through stories from community members.

Slide decks

- [Small-scale infrastructure for in-polder water management](#)
- [Improving the productivity of land in coastal Bangladesh: outcomes of Blue Gold interventions 2013-2019](#)
- [Improving the productivity of land in coastal Bangladesh: outcomes of Blue Gold interventions 2013-2020](#)
- [Food security: evolution of homestead Farmers' Field Schools](#)

Thematic brochures

- [Homestead Farmer Field Schools: pursuing food security through homestead production](#)
- [Outcomes of fisheries interventions to increase production, food security and incomes](#)
- [Improving the productivity of land in coastal Bangladesh: outcomes of interventions 2013-2020](#)
- [Improved water distribution and drainage through rehabilitation of water management infrastructure](#)

Case studies

- [Cropping intensity initiative: Rudhagara WMG increasing production of crops by effective water resources management](#)
- [Community-led agricultural water management at Uttar Khekuani](#)
- [Transformation from resource farmer to micro-entrepreneur](#)
- [HL empowering women sharing poultry successes](#)
- [Women's empowerment through homestead FFSs](#)

Videos

- [Farming-as-a-business \(Bangla with English subtitles\)](#)

Flipcharts

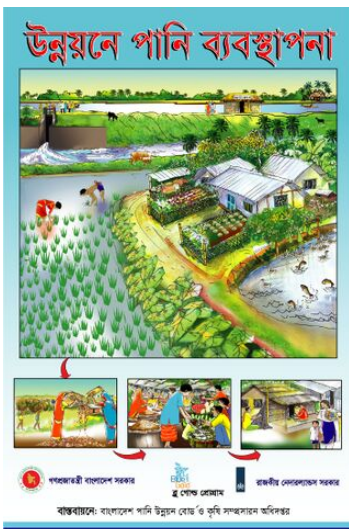
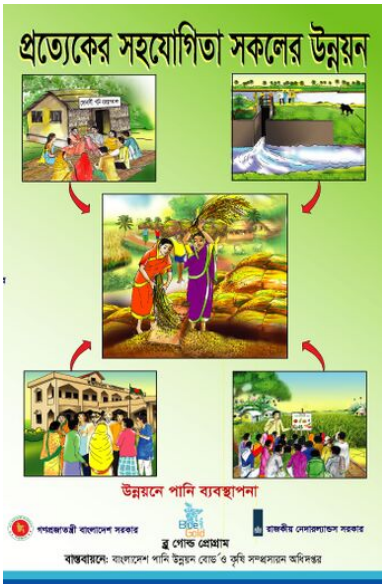
- [Gender Flipcharts: Gender equality \(Bangla\)](#)
- [Gender Flipcharts: Gender and agriculture \(Bangla\)](#)

The transformation of the agricultural production system – driven by market opportunities and enabled by better control over water resources – was central to the Blue Gold Program. To pursue agricultural transformation, BGP used an array of agricultural extension methods to stimulate, convince and teach producers about water management and new agricultural practices. At the start of Blue Gold, the Farmer Field School approach – which was embraced by DAE – was the method of choice^[1]. However, as the programme progressed, additional methods and means were applied. This ranged from the conventional (newsletter, hand-outs) to more innovative methods (Horizontal Learning, popular theatre).

The array of methods employed included:

- **Farmer Field Schools** – Farmer groups of around 25 members undergo a cycle of training sessions, including the review of a trial plot managed by a lead farmer, throughout the season and jointly investigate and experience new agricultural practices. In BGP, field crops (i.e. paddy) were addressed in DAE-led FFSs, whereas various production options around the homestead were addressed in homestead FFSs organised by the TA team. Whereas the DAE method is highly standardised and includes regular sessions throughout the season, the homestead FFS were, from 2018 onwards, split up into shorter cycles, dependent on the specific topic (i.e. vegetable cultivation, poultry rearing, beef fattening, aquaculture).
- **Horizontal Learning** – the approach borrows from a methodology developed by the WB-funded Horizontal Learning Project, which used the methodology to promote good governance practices in Union Parishads. Horizontal learning starts from the premise that you can learn from successful innovation practices employed by your peers. FFSs include elements of horizontal learning: (i) it is in essence a method by which a participant can learn from his neighbours' queries or experience; (ii) participants are encouraged to spread the new knowledge to neighbours that are not participating; and (iii) the farmer field day (FFD) that is included towards the end of an FFS presents the lessons learnt and the trial plot to a larger group of visitors. Horizontal learning, as employed by BGP is, however, treated as a method in its own right and is discussed at greater length in [Section G Chapter 33](#).
- **Videos** – the BGP TA team developed a number of videos and compiled an impressive library of materials obtained elsewhere. The latter includes also video's developed through partners of the Blue Gold Innovation Fund. Aside from videos aimed at an external audience, there are broadly speaking, two categories of video's in support to agricultural transformation:

- Instruction video's that show step-by-step how a new practice is done (e.g. using the *hajol* in poultry rearing;
- Motivational video's that call upon the observer to consider a new practice and to actively search information on the same (e.g. improving agricultural water management through community action).
- **Mass events** – these include agricultural fairs , network meetings of producers and their back-and forward market linkages and Blue Gold fairs (all termed as *melas* in this report). These are public meetings where speeches and stalls provide information on a wide range of issues. Contributions to the event are generally made by farmers already engaged with a particular innovation. '*Melas*' are common events in rural Bangladesh and generally linked to an explicit objective (eg tax *melas* are organised by UPs to promote the payment of holding tax).
- **Popular theatre** (*natok*) – Popular theatre in Bangladesh discusses social issues, is provocative, funny and highly interactive. Blue Gold used local theatre to promote discussion - for instance, on the mismanagement of water resources or using group cohesion to overcome the self-interest of an influential individual - during which the audience reacted with cheers, laughter and boos. At the end of the play, a representative of the WMG or Union Parishad gave an analysis of the issues covered in the play often with local illustrations, and encouraged the audience to respond. Interestingly, in internal annual retreats, polder-based members of the TA team also used popular theatre to present issues they had encountered in the field.
- **Demonstrations** – The transfer of knowledge on new agricultural practices and water management was demonstrated to selected farmers who willingly adopted the new practices on their lands, and became leaders and extension agents to neighbours and visiting farmers - using their farms as demonstration schemes. The demonstrations were provided with agricultural inputs and sometimes contributions to costs of water management infrastructure. A number of demonstrations were organised:
 - **Community Agricultural Water Management** – combining knowledge, inputs and infrastructure with beneficiary contributions to remodel a local water system and to introduce new crops and agronomic and water management practices. Generally, it was applied on waterlogged lands.
 - **Crop Intensification Initiative** – farmers on higher lands (where water management was not a constraint) demonstrated the value of annual cropping patterns through the provision of seeds and inputs.
 - **Community-led Fisheries** – Same as for CAWM, transformation was supported by knowledge, inputs and infrastructure support.
- **Printed material** – Various materials were produced to support the introduction of new agricultural practices. This included a newsletter (*Barta*) distributed to WMGs, posters (mainly on water management), hand-outs (generally distributed during FFSs or *mela*), as well as signboards and notice boards informing by-passers about specific activities. Printed material generally complements other extension methods.





To guide the development and use of the wide range of extension methodologies, an [external review](#) was conducted in early 2018 by Agro-Insight, an international advisory service on agricultural extension methods^[2]. Agro-Insight commented positively on the range of instruments and the creative approach to their use, but did not offer guidance on how to maximise the impact of the extension instruments. To address this, an internal working group of Blue Gold TA staff was established. Members of this group were familiar with the range of extension methodologies and had worked alongside the Agro-Insight team. The recommendations of this working group were presented in a [strategic action plan](#). While the choice of instruments was to an extent predetermined by the project design (e.g. use of FFS by DAE was enshrined in the Department's policy and in its budget), the Project has influence over how the instruments are used; and on how frequently they are employed.

Decisions on the use of instruments based on considerations of reach, impact and efficiency are helpful in guiding decisions (see Table 32.1). Whilst quantitative data is available for reach and cost, scores on impact based on judgement and are therefore more debatable.

Instruments for scaling-up the production system transformation				
#	Instrument	Immediate reach-out	Impact on Transformation	Cost/unit
1	Horizontal Learning			
2	Homestead Farmer Field Schools (new format)			
3	Handheld methods			
4	Popular theater			
5	Video			
6	Crop farmer field schools (DAE)			
7	Mass events			

Table 32.1 Cost-effectiveness assessment extension methods in use in BGP

- The entries in the above table are grouped from high to low cost-efficiency. Mass events are at the bottom. Despite a high outreach in number of attendants per event, the impact on cropping system change is limited against a relatively high cost. Video and popular theatre also rank low because on their own (as a single event) they have little impact. The value of these two instruments emerges, however, in combination with others: i.e. showing a video at

an FFS in combination with follow-up discussions and explanations.

- Homestead FFSs rank higher than crop FFS, reflecting a lower cost per unit for the homestead FFSs. This reflects the changed approach adopted after 2018, when the number of training sessions was reduced and separate FFSs covered single specific topics (eg beef fattening, home garden production, etc.). It also reflects the involvement of Farmer Trainers (FTs) as local resource persons trained by BGP to provide services – such as a homestead FFS – to their communities.
- The DAE FFS come out rather low based on their limited impact. The exact rank is sensitive to how much impact an FFS has and hence to the quality of implementation. Breaking down FFSs into smaller programmes, as done for homestead FFSs, may enhance cost efficiency.
- CAWM, CII and CLF (the demonstration schemes) obtain the higher middle position. When ranking, it was found that the outcome here is particularly sensitive to small changes in how reach-out, impact or costs per event are rated. Ranking is particularly difficult as the capital investment differs widely per location. This shows how arbitrary the ranking is, but also how sensitive cost efficiency is to how well an instrument is applied.
- Horizontal learning appears to have relatively high cost efficiency. Yet, the method was and continued to be used sparingly – one reason being that any single WMG is only willing to host a relatively small number of visits.
- Printed material has not been included in the comparison as it generally is used as a secondary instrument; i.e. in combination with (and adding value to) other instruments.

Moreover, methods serve to some extent different purposes and cannot always be interchanged. But very often methods can be combined to greater effect: e.g. a relevant video can be added-on to an extension event, thereby reinforcing the messages in a rather cost-effective manner.

The strategic action plan provided both practical guidance and internalised the lessons learnt which resulted in a more creative use of the methods: homestead FFS teams were refocused into a more effective format (see also [Chapter 25](#) and [Chapter 31](#)); horizontal learning was organised for agricultural innovation but also to compare experiences on organisation management; the quality of video material spiked; and *natok* were adapted for use in formal events, such as the formal signing ceremonies for the O&M agreement between BWDB and WMAs.

While there is no answer to the question ‘which is the best extension method?’; posing the question and struggling with it provided a beginning of a more free, creative and, in the end, more effective use of methods.

Communication aimed at organisations[\[edit | edit source\]](#)

Communication methods and means were also employed to communicate with stakeholder agencies and beneficiary organisations. Communication aimed at beneficiaries – described above – had from the onset an explicit focus on the transformation of agriculture and water management.

Communication aimed at organisations had a less focussed aim. From 2018 onwards, however, communication aimed at sector agencies was systematically aimed at reinvigorating water sector governance in Bangladesh with lessons from Participatory Water Management.

- **Barta** – The Bangla newsletter ‘*Barta*’, which is primarily aimed at WMOs but which is shared within the sector as well, had an intended quarterly frequency and has been published 16 times (refer [File Library "newsletter"](#)) with a wide circulation among WMGs and WMAs, and a limited circulation to local organisations (UP, Upazila offices, local NGO, Community clinic, college, FFS/MFS group, DAE, and BWDB offices) and national partner agencies. The [final issue of 'Barta'](#) was published in September 2019. With the growing number of beneficiaries,

the total circulation was increased to 7,000 issues:

- Barta provided four pages in colour on (i) recent main events within the BGP program (e.g. DAE mela, agreement signing ceremonies, crop cut festivals, etc.); (ii) noteworthy WMG activities, like khal cleaning; (iii) success stories of WMGs, WMAs and / or individual beneficiaries; (iv) technical information on agriculture and livestock production. In each issue, one particular polder was basic progress data on BGP were included, like number of WMO formed, FFS, MFS, enrolment in WMOs, civil work progress, etc.
 - Initially, preparation of Barta was outsourced but the quality did not justify the high cost of doing so and subsequently an internal editorial board was formed, including BWDB and DAE representatives, the three zonal coordinators and two TA team members. Contributions were mainly solicited from the staff, with a careful review of contents, length and regional balance. Both encouraging staff to contribute as well as editing their contributions proved to be time consuming.
 - A major lesson is that strong discipline is needed to ensure timely and regular publication. Timeliness is especially important given the seasonality of agriculture and water management.
 - The impact of WMGs or farmers seeing their own story in print is substantial; while success stories also inspire the readers to follow the set example.
- **Trend Watcher** – As a result of a recommendation of the Aide Memoire of the Annual Review Mission 2016, the Blue Gold Trend Watcher. was issued as an English-language bulletin the timing of whose publication was loosely aimed to review the performance of the preceding season. It aimed at summarizing and sharing updates on project interventions and achievements as well as on stakeholder participation in water management and economic activities. Monitoring results at both output level and outcome level, success stories of WMOs or WMG members, innovative initiatives of BGP or WMOs, challenges and limitations in implementing BGP interventions were among the major topics of the bulletin. While *Barta*, the Bangla newsletter, was aimed at the WMGs and WMAs, the 'Trend Watcher' targeted management representatives of project partners, partner agencies/donors and allied organizations. In total, six issues of the 'Trend Watcher' were published between [December 2016](#) and [December 2019](#).
 - **Publications** – Blue Gold received some coverage in magazines and newspapers. An extensive article by BWDB's Program Coordinating Director and published in a national English-language newspaper in 2019, explicitly pursued the broader adoption of integrated water management in the coastal zone (See: Box 30.1)^[3].

Box 32.1: Blue Gold Program: A way forward for coastal Polder Water Management by Eng. Md. Amirul Hossain

“It may be concluded that, drainage during monsoon and availability of usable water round the year has been ensured through repair/re-sectioning of embankment, re-excavation of interior channels/Khals, repair/reconstruction, timely operation of water management infrastructures and active participation of local stakeholders of Polder area. Increased agricultural production as well as improvement of natural environment has become possible by protecting saline water intrusion through water control structures inside Polder area and storing/preserving rain water in re-excavated khal/channels and other water bodies. Natural resource based agricultural production, job opportunity and livelihood development have been accelerated. Improved livelihood of local people has become possible due to integrated and synchronous activities of water management, agricultural production and community involvement/participation. Production of crops and fishes in the water bodies inside Polder area has been increased due to proper drainage and availability of saline free useable water. Huge change is being observed in improvement of environment as well as in livelihood. Sustainable development has also become possible for these program activities. BGP has been playing an important role in poverty reduction and to achieve food security in 14 upazilas of four districts through integrated participatory water management. This may be considered as a way forward for improvement of coastal polder water management”.

- **Advisory group meetings** – Realising that written publications only go so far in influencing organisational actions, Blue Gold used advisory group meetings to encourage cross-sectoral dialogue on participatory water management. These informal meetings were intended to allow senior representatives of BWDB, DAE and LGRDC to discuss the strategy of the project and the policy environment. Attendees included EKN, DG BWDB, PCD BWDB, PD DAE, a representative of LGRDC and TA team. In most cases, a presentation was made at the beginning of the meeting on a specific issue, followed by responses from the attendees, and a round-up of decisions made. Although the meetings in this form were discontinued from 2016 because of a lack of support from BWDB, discussions on PWM policy restarted in 2019 when a team of senior national experts prepared three interlocking working papers with the aim of engaging a select circle of government in a policy dialogue, as described in [chapter 20 Way Forward](#).
- **Seminars and congresses.** Blue Gold representatives spoke regularly at workshops, congresses and seminars. In doing this, emphasis was gradually shifted from activity reports to promotion of renewed policy development with respect to water governance and participatory water management.

The communication aimed at organisations would have benefited from an immediate and strong focus on further development of the state of the art of participatory water management in Bangladesh; both in an immediately practical sense by supporting PWM practices within the 22 polders; as well as by initiating and contributing to a national dialogue on water governance and the lessons from PWM. The latter is – since 2019 – taken up by a panel of senior experts preparing an independent review within the context of the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (see [chapter 20 ‘Way Forward’](#)).

References[\[edit | edit source\]](#)

1. [↑](#) For background on Farmer Field Schools: <http://www.fao.org/farmer-field-schools/home/en/>
2. [↑](#) *Blue Gold Program Communication interventions and extension methods – A study of sharing information with farmers in Bangladesh*. Agro-Insight. March 2018.
3. [↑](#) Hossain, Md. Amirul (2019-10-22). "Blue Gold Program: A way forward for coastal Polder Water Management". *New Nation*.

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A defined set of temporary activities through which facilitators seek to effect change

Blue Gold Program

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

Department of Agricultural Extension, a department of the Ministry of Agriculture responsible for disseminating scientific research and new knowledge on agricultural practices through communication and learning activities for farmers in agriculture, agricultural marketing, nutrition and business studies.

Learning from peers; and in the context of Blue Gold, farmer-to-farmer learning in which a host WMG invites representatives from visiting WMGs to witness an event - such as the harvesting of a new variety of rice - to pass on the knowledge and lessons gained from their experience

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

contiguous area of land operated as a single unit by a farmer - average area of 27 decimals (0.11 ha), with a normal range between 10 and 70 decimals (0.04 to 0.28 ha)

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

Technical Assistance

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these

activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

World Bank

Farmer Field Day - Exchange events organized at the end of each Farmer Field School to share the FFS learnings with other community members

A hajol is an unfired earthenware nesting vessel for egg hatching, with small receptacles for water and seed to provide the immediate needs. The hajol saves the hen effort and time for searching food, thus ensuring proper hatching in less time, thereby reducing egg waste.

Also known as 'business linkages'. Linkages refer to the trading relationships between and among producers, input providers and traders, and other enterprises in a supply chain or value chain. We refer to Backward linkages on the input side and Forward linkages on the output side of the producer.

popular theatre, a living tradition especially in rural areas of Bangladesh, and a powerful and accepted instrument which can be used to raise discussion on sensitive issues

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households or a population of just over 1,500.

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

An area of low-lying land surrounded by an earthen embankment to prevent flooding by river or seawater, with associated structures which are provided to either drain excess rainwater within the polder or to admit freshwater to be stored in a khal for subsequent use for irrigation.

Any individual or group who, in one way or another is favourably influenced by the project.

Community-led Agricultural Water Management - with DAE, Blue Gold established a network of schemes for demonstration purposes where locally-applicable annual cropping patterns are introduced along with water level control facilitated by small-scale water infrastructure, and the development of value chain skills in farmers

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households

or a population of just over 1,500.

human intervention in the capture, conveyance, utilisation and drainage of surface and/or ground water in a certain area: a process of social interaction between stakeholders around the issue of water control.

Farmer Trainer - Well-performing and capable farmers, previously trained in Farmer Field Schools, who became FFS facilitator themselves after ToT training

Farmer Trainer - Well-performing and capable farmers, previously trained in Farmer Field Schools, who became FFS facilitator themselves after ToT training

Cropping Intensity Initiative: Year-long demonstrations with farmers on increasing cropping intensity related to improved water management, also involving market actors, and by organising demand driven sessions and workshops

Community-led Fisheries

Bangladesh Water Development Board, government agency which is responsible for surface water and groundwater management in Bangladesh, and lead implementing agency for the Blue Gold Program

Water Management Association - In Blue Gold, the polder-level representative of WMGs, and signatory to an O&M Agreement with BWDB

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

Water Management Organizations - The common name of organizations of the local stakeholders of a water resource project/sub-project/scheme. The concept WMO typically refers to WMGs and WMAs (and/or WMFs) together

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

Non-Governmental Organisation

Market-oriented Farmer Field School - Farmer Field Schools dealing with cash crops or other commercial production, such as aquaculture, integrating market orientation. Specific MFS were conducted in the first years of BGP; later all FFS included market orientation.

drainage channel or canal

Water Management Organizations - The common name of organizations of the local stakeholders of a water resource project/sub-project/scheme. The concept WMO typically refers to WMGs and WMAs (and/or WMFs) together

A process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.

Earthen dyke or bundh raised above surrounding ground level, for example so that roads or railway lines are above highest flood levels, or so that an area is empoldered to protect it from external floods and saline waters.

the adjustment of gates in water management infrastructure to control hydraulic conditions (water levels and discharges) in a water management system.

A livelihood is a way of making a living. It comprises capabilities, skills, assets (including material and social resources), and activities that households put together to produce food, meet basic needs, earn income, or establish a means of living in any other way.

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the contractual representative of the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands and signatory to the agreement for the Blue Gold Program with the External Resources Division of the Ministry of Finance as the signatory for the Government of Bangladesh

Director General

Program Coordinating Director

Project Director

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

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Variants

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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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