33 Horizontal learning

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Within the methods used by BGP for agricultural extension and for communication on innovative practices in general, Horizontal Learning stands out for its cost-effectiveness (see chapter 32). Blue Gold's monitoring data recorded a staggering 243,900 participants in horizontal learning activities[1]

up to June 2019. This figure includes exchange visits and farmer field days organised through Farmer Field Schools (FFS) also as horizontal learning events. In addition, there is likely to be a fair deal of double counting of participants.

Briefing Materials



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

Case studies

• HL empowering women sharing poultry successes

This chapter looks specifically at the Horizontal Learning method that was introduced with Blue Gold from late-2016, and which involved some 6,500 participants up to mid-2019. To distinguish this approach from the use of the words 'horizontal learning' as a container term for other kinds of peer-to-peer exchanges and gatherings; the specific method referred to in this chapter is capitalised as Horizontal Learning (HL).

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Horizontal Learning – the approach in BGP[edit | edit source]



Figure 33.1 HLP steps of knowledge sharing

The World Bank-funded Horizontal Learning Program (HLP) was set up to promote good governance by Bangladesh' Local Government Institutions (LGIs). It provided a structured approach for peer-to-peer learning and for replication of lessons learnt (see Figure 33.1)[2]. HLP organised workshops in which participating elected local leaders were asked to identify a good governance practice employed in their constituency. Several Unions or Upazilas participated and the proposed good practices were presented, discussed and assessed. The participants then selected the best practice, to which they would subsequently make an exposure visit. During the visit, the practice was reviewed in detail and the visit also included a session to prepare a back-home action plan aimed at replicating the practice. Good practices were documented and included on a central website, with tracking for their replication.

Blue Gold adapted the HLP approach to suit WMGs. Good practices were identified by TA polder teams, and collated in two booklets in Bangla[3]: The first collection of factsheets (38 no.) were

published in October 2017 and the second collection of factsheets (45 no.) were published in February 2019. The successes described in the factsheets ranged from women's participation in decision-making, the introduction of new agricultural practices, market successes, operation and maintenance of water infrastructure and running a savings and credit operation. The factsheets were distributed to TA polder staff and WMOs with the intention that community development facilitators (CDFs), the TA team's field level staff, would use them to identify subjects of immediate interest to the WMG - and to then encourage the WMG to organise horizontal learning visits to find out more about the good practices from the originating WMG (whose contact details were provided with each factsheet).

With the aim of expanding CAWM demonstrations in new areas, Horizontal Learning was used to showcase existing CAWM sites to encourage uptake by farmers in the new areas. This approach was also embraced for community fishery activities. When a successful practice was identified, Horizontal Learning visits were arranged in which the host WMG invites representatives from 4 to 5 neighbouring WMGs as well as representatives of LGIs and departments (notably DAE) to witness their success. The success is explained in a courtyard session, after which the program offers an opportunity for field visits and interviews. The visitors then reconvene for a Q&A session with the host, and are then encouraged to provide feedback and lessons they have learnt, and to plan to replicate the success in their own farms.

Horizontal Learning – An assessment of BGP's experience[edit | edit source]

In general, HL events were festive occasions that created good-will and enthusiasm amongst the participants as well as pride amongst the host-protagonists of the good practice. Because they were often attended by LGI representatives and DAE, DLS and DOF experts, they also served as networking events. While the TA polder teams often initiated and organised the event and assisted with (a small) financial contribution, the receiving WMGs always took clear ownership of the program and took their role as hosts very seriously.

No systematic review has been made of replication as an effect of HL. Most new CAWMs have reviewed an experience elsewhere but it is difficult to say whether that was the sole factor in their decision to apply CAWM. The rapid expansion of HYV T Aman (especially the BR52 variety) may have benefited from HL, but the pace of expansion appears to exceed the rate of HL events. Introduction of new mustard varieties and mustard cultivation as a chance crop benefitted from HL, as well as from efforts to improve forward- and backward market linkages.

Although the Horizontal Learning approach was appreciated by the BGP TA team and considered as a highly cost effective approach, it was – over a 3-year period – only used to reach a mere 6,500 people. This is only 3% of the total reach-out recorded for all peer-to-peer extension methods used by the project[1], and implies an estimated 10 HL sessions per polder over a 3-year period. With hindsight, this was due to the following factors:

- Organisational – The HL approach requires the identification of opportunities for HL by the polder teams. The challenges in transforming the BGP TA organisation to an integrated and highly decentralised organisation – described elsewhere – have hampered a more intensive and creative use of the HL method.
- Planning – HL came into the programme as an add-on and not as a replacement of other methods. Targets for the other methods continued to exist and continued to attract the programme's energy. At the same time, only modest targets for HL were set in the annual plans, with concomitant funding.

- Initiative – HL had no clear and continuous owner within the team, who would follow-up with colleagues and polder teams on the application of the approach. The attention given to HL has therefore been somewhat short-lived.
- Culture – One could speculate that an internal culture of horizontal learning would greatly encourage the application of HL among the WMOs. Some polder teams did emphasise peer-to-peer learning, e.g. by setting up small Facebook groups wherein experiences, reports, etc. were shared, but cross-learning was neither set-up at a higher level, nor strongly encouraged.

The application of Horizontal Learning in BGP was modest but significant. The method attracted quite some attention and this sparked a replication by a third party using the BGP innovation fund. During the Blue Gold Program, HL proved to be a viable addition – and a potential alternative – to other methods of agricultural extension.

References[edit | edit source]

1. ↑ [1.0] [1.1] *WMG Tracker FINAL Report to June 2019, Working Paper 9H*. Euroconsult Mott MacDonald & Associates. October 2019.
2. ↑ Mikelle Adgate, Maryam Hariri, Kathryn Matheny, Ethel Mendez, Tammy Singer (2009). *Horizontal Learning Program: An Independent Assessment*.
3. ↑ *Fact Sheets, 2017 and 2019* (Originals in Bengali). Euroconsult Mott MacDonald & Associates.

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Blue Gold Program

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.

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

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Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

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.

Technical Assistance

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.

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

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

actions taken to prevent or repair the deterioration of water management infrastructure and to keep the physical components of a water management system in such a state that they can serve their intended function.

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

Community Development Facilitator - a member of the Blue Gold technical assistance team who lived and worked in a specific polder, and provided the main point of contact between the project and the polder communities

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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

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.

Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

Department of Livestock Services, a government department under the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock responsible for the livestock industry in Bangladesh

High Yielding Variety - Introduced varieties developed through formal breeding programs. HYVs have a higher yield potential than local varieties but require correspondingly high inputs of fertiliser and irrigation to achieve high yields.

transplanted aman; a rice crop, with nurseries for seedlings started in June/July, for transplanting in July/August in areas liable to a maximum flood depth of about 50cm. Harvested in November/December. Local varieties are sensitive to daylength whereas modern varieties are insensitive or only slightly sensitive.

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.

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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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