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Blue Gold Program success story

Women's leadership in WMA polder organisations

Context

The responsibility for water management in Bangladesh is shifting from the government to community-based water management organisations.

Water management organisations exist in two categories. Water Management Groups (WMGs) operate at a community level, and are typically responsible for water management in around 250 ha. Water Management Associations (WMAs) represent the WMGs and polder inhabitants in a polder (several thousands of hectares of low-lying land surrounded by an embankment to prevent flooding).

The Blue Gold Program supported:

Total polders: 22

Total WMGs: 511

Total WMAs: 35

In small polders, there is one WMA. In larger polders, there are two WMAs.

Each WMG nominates 4 representatives as WMA members, of which at least one must be a woman. At least 4 seats for every 12-member WMA Executive Committee are reserved for women.

WMA functions

WMAs have responsibilities that exceed the mandate of individual WMGs. These include:

- preparing water management plans

- managing the operation of main sluices
- coordinating maintenance work
- resolving conflicts between WMGs
- communicating with local government institutions such as Union Parishads and districts, relevant authorities such as the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), and with the private sector

WMAs liaise with the above actors to improve and better manage water infrastructure and to enhance agricultural development in their areas.

Constraints faced by women members of WMAs

Despite an increasing number of women with leadership capacities and water management knowledge, women still face specific constraints to becoming WMA leaders. These include:

- Social and religious barriers, including the pressure of domestic responsibilities
- Issues relating to travelling and an absence of security, as WMA meetings and activities often take place outside of their own villages. Inspections at night of illegal operations of sluice gates or illegal fishing are more problematic for women
- Limited acceptance of women as leaders and decision-makers, and in liaising with government officials

Characteristics of water management organisations

Water Management Groups are the basic organisational units representing local stakeholders. In Blue Gold polders, one WMG on average represents 250 ha, 365 households, and just over 1,500 people.

Water Management Associations are the polder level representatives of WMGs. WMAs sign O&M agreements with the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) for the operation and maintenance of the water infrastructure in the polders.

WMA O&M sub-committees are responsible for planning, operation and maintenance of water infrastructure in a specific sluice catchment. One O&M sub-committee usually represents several WMGs.

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Summary[[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]


Women's leadership in WMA polder organisations

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

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.

File history

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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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