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Blue Gold Program
Collective vegetable cultivation by women's groups
27 May 2021

1. Introduction and background

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, supporting Water Management Organisations and enhancing agricultural development in order to benefit from the increased opportunities facilitated by improved water management. From its start, BGP aimed for inclusiveness as a transversal issue, striving that also women and the poorest households would benefit -directly or indirectly- from its interventions. For this purpose a gender approach had been developed. Poor and landless households were targeted by the homestead Farmer Field Schools aiming to increase homestead production, such as poultry rearing and vegetable cultivation. The poorest households, in particular those without homestead land, benefited from the increased demand for wage labour, forthcoming from the increased cropping intensity and higher crops yields. Women became increasingly deployed as wage labourers, also because men from landless households found off-farm employment. Over time an increase in wages was observed, especially in agricultural peak seasons, including some evidence of a reducing wage gap between men and women.

When in March 2020 the Covid-19 measures came into effect, many things changed in the BGP polders. Transport limitations led to reduced farm gate prices and incomes, whereas the return of male migrant workers to their villages increased the local supply of wage labour, resulting in less work for women wage labourers, thus less income. Lockdown and hygiene measures also led to increased domestic work for women; domestic violence reportedly increased. Reduced incomes led to less food available, especially in the poorer households, with women sacrificing food by skipping meals more often than male household members¹.

This situation led to the initiative for collective vegetable cultivation for women's groups, which started in November 2020. This initiative was also inspired by existing examples of women's collective actions in Bangladesh, which contributed to increased income and empowerment of the involved women.



2. Objective

The immediate rationale for the collective vegetable cultivation initiative were the detrimental effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the poorest women in the Blue Gold area, losing income opportunities and experiencing a reduced purchasing power, even for basic needs as food. The initiative aimed to provide a supply of vegetables for own consumption, with some surplus for sales, hence for some extra income. Moreover, the group initiative also created opportunities for women to meet and support each other, though sticking to covid-19 measures, such as social distancing.

¹ See the report on the rapid Covid-19 survey by the Blue Gold Program: Final Report Covid-19 Survey of 3 June 2021.

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Collective vegetable cultivation by women's groups

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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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