Summary of Section F - Responsible Development: Inclusion and Sustainability

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In the context of the Blue Gold Program (BGP) Responsible Development refers to the two elements

in BGP's Theory of Change presented as transversal aspects in figure F.1 to contribute to more sustainable and fair results.

The first element is 'inclusiveness', meaning that all inhabitants in the BGP polders, including women and poor people, should have access to opportunities and benefits created by BGP.

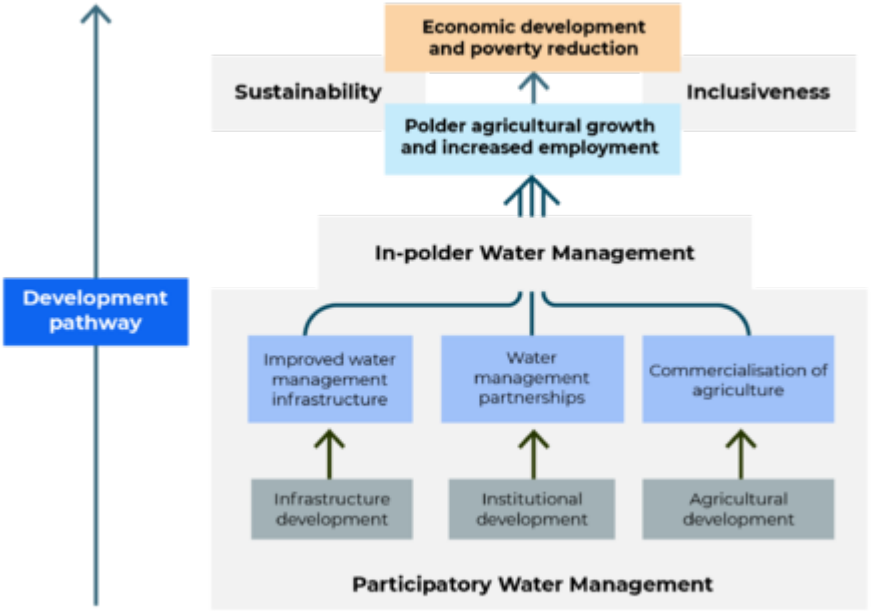

Figure F.1 Simplified Blue Gold Program Theory of Change

The second element is 'sustainability', which reflects Blue Gold efforts to create conditions so that its achievements would be sustained after the program's completion.

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Inclusiveness[edit | edit source]

In practice, inclusiveness meant that landless and smallholder farmers as well as women were also targeted by BGP interventions. This is in line with the central premise of the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals: “leave no one behind”. As the majority of the inhabitants in BGP polders are smallholder and landless farmers, BGP was already a poverty-targeted project at its core. While all households in the BGP polders benefitted from improved flood protection, households without crop land benefitted to a lesser degree from the infrastructural and institutional water management interventions than farming households with access to crop land. To broaden BGP’s beneficiary base and deepen its outreach to the poor and marginalized, three additional strategies were implemented.

1. A gender strategy to improve the inclusion of women in BGP’s interventions, aiming at women’s empowerment and increasing gender equality (chapter 24)
2. Poverty reduction by inclusion of the poorest households in enhancing homestead production (chapter 25)
3. Poverty reduction by engaging local labour - both men and women - from landless households in construction works through the deployment of Labour Contracting Societies (chapter 26).

Gender equality and women’s empowerment[edit | edit source]

Gender equality means that women and men have equal chances and opportunities; women’s empowerment means that women gain more control over their own lives, for example, by increased access to resources and increased participation in decision-making, leading to improved well-being. Within BGP, attention to gender was materialized by gender mainstreaming, complemented with selected specific gender activities, as represented in figure F.2.

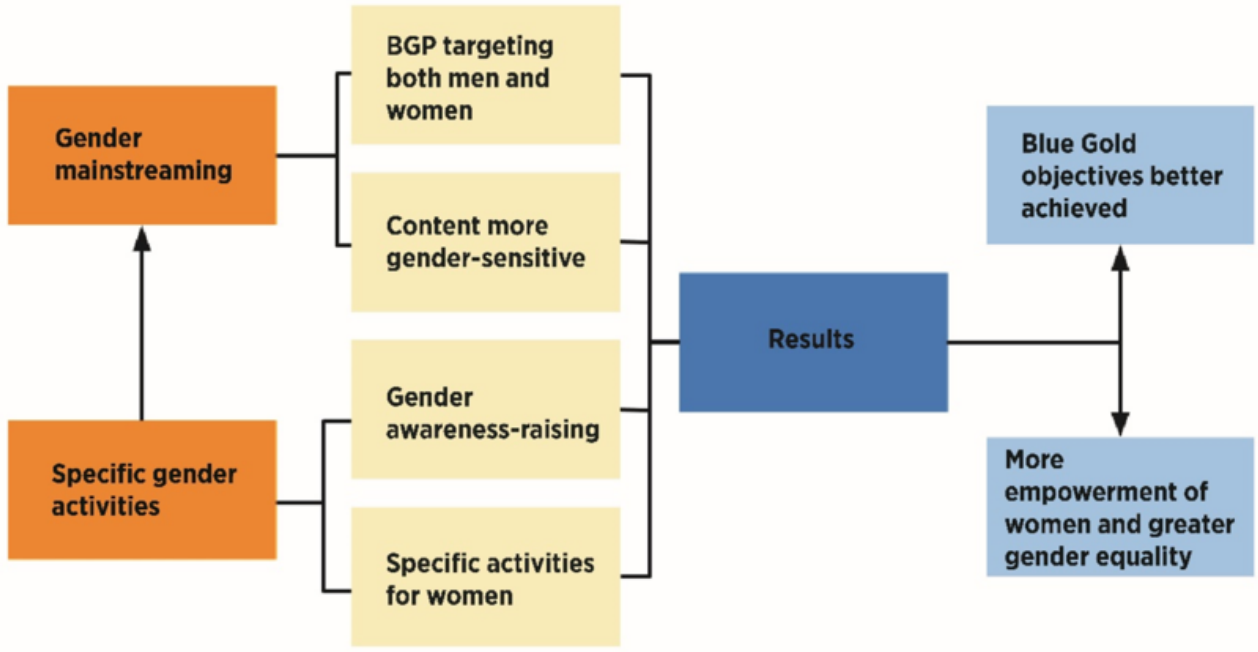

Figure F.2 Gender at a glance – within the Blue Gold Program

The gender approach developed by BGP in the inception phased focused on enhancing the participation of women in BGP activities -next to men-, mostly with quantitative output targets. Over time, there was a shift towards more qualitative and transformative results, for example, by better promoting changes in gender norms.

Gender mainstreaming included:

- **Involving both women and men in Water Management Organisations (WMGs and WMAs):** enhancing women's membership of WMGs (43% achieved); women as members of executive committees of WMGs and WMAs (over 33%); and promoting active participation and influence of women by increasing the proportion of women in important positions (presidents, secretaries and treasurers). Women's leadership and decision-making capacities improved over time.
- **Ensuring women and men acquired and apply skills, knowledge and improved technology,** by including a high proportion of women in all Farmer Fields Schools (62%), especially in homestead FFS (88% women), but also in other FFS categories; gender messages became gradually integrated in every FFS.
- **Encouraging both women and men to develop market linkages and to take collective actions:** Targeting women with market information met a previously unrecognised need of women farmers; integrating market orientation in (homestead) FFS was very successful.

Examples of specific gender activities:

- Gender courtyard sessions (CYS) raised awareness among men and women about gender equality, and emphasised that WMG membership was open to men and women.
- Gender and leadership development training (GLD) encouraged equal participation in work, decision-making and leadership.
- Various specific activities for women, such as specific training on market linkages and women's empowerment.

Results of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment[edit | edit source]

- Participatory water management benefitted from the involvement of both men and women, with women becoming valued as WMO leaders, engaging in decision-making for the benefit of the entire community.
- Women contribute to increased agricultural production, not only at homesteads, but also in field crops, taking up tasks previously only done by men; in particular, women often provide all labour for rabi crops.
- Women thus contribute to poverty reduction, improved livelihoods and increased resilience.
- Increased economic and social empowerment of women, as women's access to information, skills and resources increased, their decision-making within the households (and WMOs) improved, and more women became entrepreneur. Women receive more respect, enjoy improved mobility and have wider social networks; they more often engage in leadership roles.
- A gradual change in gender norms was observed, such as less rigid labour divisions, men better accepting women as leaders, and husbands taking their wives opinions more seriously, including some first evidence of men taking up a share of domestic work.

Various challenges remain, such as the need for agricultural extension to refocus on actual women's needs, especially in the light of feminization of agriculture; the heavy and unequal total workload of women; the remaining gap in agricultural wages; and the relatively lower level of women's participation, especially at higher level institutions as WMAs.

An important lesson learnt is that gender mainstreaming and quota worked, especially when accompanied by gender specific activities. This contributed both to greater gender equality and women's empowerment, and to better achieving BGP's overall objectives.

Poverty Focus: Development of homestead production[edit | edit source]

The Blue Gold Program distinguished three categories of households in its polders: (1) households with access to farmland, thus potentially benefiting from improved water management and BGP's interventions to promote commercialisation of agriculture; (2) households without access to farmland, but having other means, skills and/or assets, and thus involved in non-farm economic activities; and (3) households without access to farmland, but without means, skills and assets for income generation or employment. About half of the latter category of households – or about 15% of all households in the BGP polders - have some homestead land. These households were targeted by BGP's homestead Farmer Field Schools (FFSs)[Notes 1], enhancing the production of homestead vegetables, fruit trees, poultry (chicken and ducks), livestock and fish (in small ponds).

In the first four years of BGP, the so-called 'bundled' approach was followed, adopted from DAE. This meant that in one FFS cycle several modules were bundled. The two most common combinations were (1) homestead gardening (vegetables), poultry rearing and nutrition; and (2) fish culture, beef fattening and nutrition. Each FFS of the 'bundled' approach covered 25 sessions, with a BGP field staff member as facilitator. Until March 2018, a total of 634 bundled FFS had been implemented from cycle 1 to cycle 10, with 15,850 participants (84% women farmers).

After a recommendation of the 2017 Annual Review Mission, the FFS approach was revised to increase the number of beneficiaries. The two major changes were: (1) FFS would only cover one module, reducing the number of sessions per FFS and (2) Farmer Trainers were recruited and trained to facilitate the FFS, instead of (only) TA field staff. This also lead to capacity building of resource persons residing in the polders. Under the new approach many more FFS were implemented per cycle, especially in cycle 11 to 13; however, due to COVID-19 only a relatively few FFS could be conducted in cycles 14 and 15 (2020/2021). In total, 544 single-module FFSs were implemented, with 13,600 participants, of whom 92% were women farmers.

Results of the homestead FFS[edit | edit source]

Numbers of FFS and outreach[edit | edit source]

In the 15 FFS cycles, a total of 1,178 homestead FFSs were conducted, delivering 1,806 modules[Notes 2]. Of the total number of modules, 41% were on poultry rearing, 25% on homestead gardening / vegetable cultivation, 17% on beef fattening and 16% on fish culture. The total number of participants was 29,450, of whom 25,856 were women (88%). Assuming an estimated 10% multiple participation, a net 26,505 households were assumed to have benefited directly from the FFS training. It is estimated that twice this number (53,010 households) were indirectly reached: by learning from their neighbours and/or by learning from Farmer Field Day demonstrations.

In total, 77% of all homestead FFS participants were from households with less than 50 decimals or 0.5 acres of land, i.e. considered as landless. From cycle 11 onwards, a proxy criterion for poverty was used to define the poorest households, consisting of three sub-criteria: land ownership, participation in wage labour and house structure (single structure thatch house). On this stricter basis an estimated 42% of all homestead FFS participants belonged to the poorest households; extrapolation showed that over 33,000 poorest households in the BGP area benefited directly and

indirectly from these FFS.

Increases in homestead production[edit | edit source]

Overall, the uptake of improved technologies demonstrated during the FFS was high. As a result, there was a significant production increase, as summarized in Table F.1.

Table F.1 Average production increase as measured by the FFS baseline and endline surveys among all FFS participants

Product promoted by FFS	Before FFS	After FFS
Egg production per farmer per month (in numbers)	46	86
Birds (chicken/ducks) sold per farmer/month (in numbers)	1.5	4.5
Meat production per animal (cow) (in kg)	172	236
Fish production per farmer per cycle (in kg)	40.6	135.8
Average # of vegetables cultivated on homestead per farmer	3.3	7.2
Average consumption of vegetables per person (in grams/week)	941	1,625

Other changes resulting from the FFSs included: an increase in the use of mobile phones to contact market actors (by both men and women farmers); an increase in collective actions for buying inputs or selling produce; and more joint decision-making by husbands and wives.

Cost-benefit analyses[edit | edit source]

The direct costs of all 15 FFS cycles amounted to BDT 55,389,035 in total, or BDT 47,020 on average per FFS, excluding indirect costs, such as salaries of TA staff, costs of monitoring visits and office costs. The direct costs correspond with BDT 1,881 per FFS participant and BDT 697 per household reached directly and indirectly. When comparing the value of the increased production, either per year (poultry) or per season (fish and beef fattening) with the direct costs of the FFS, it can be concluded that the increased production value well outweighs the FFS costs, hence, the return on investments was high.

Main lessons learnt[edit | edit source]

- The households of greatest need – but with access to a homestead garden - are best reached by poultry FFS, followed by homestead vegetable and fruit cultivation FFS.
- Women's participation in FFSs contributes to their empowerment. Apart from gaining more knowledge and skills and increasing production and income, they increased in confidence, and expanded their social networks and contacts with market actors. The inclusion of a small percentage of men as FFS participants was found to enhance women's empowerment.
- A remaining challenge is to better focus the content of FFS modules on real needs and feasible innovations.

Poverty Focus: Labour Contracting Societies[edit | edit source]

Labour Contracting Societies (LCSs) are defined as groups of usually landless people who engage into a contract with an agency to carry out a certain type and volume of earth work within a given

time. Deployment of LCS groups is seen as a poverty reduction measure for LCS members for two reasons: higher expected daily incomes than as daily labourers and using savings from LCS income to invest in productive resources in order to generate income after the LCS work has been completed. BGP's annual review missions emphasized the importance of LCS work for poverty reduction.

It was foreseen that at least 50% of the earthwork in the Blue Gold Program would be by LCS groups, in particular the re-excavation of khals and re-sectioning of embankments. Initially the contracts were directly between BWDB and the LCS groups. After PWMR 2014 became effective, the contracts were between BWDB and concerned WMGs, with LCSs as subcontractors to WMGs. Through this arrangement, WMGs were provided with a management fee of 5% of the contract amount.

As of June 2019, 502 LCS groups had worked on Blue Gold contracts, with 31,437 members, of whom 10,766 were women (34%). Some 25% of the total value of earthwork (BDT 3,662 lakh) had been allocated to LCS groups, providing temporary income to its members, usually during one construction season of several months. From the start of BGP, the experiences with the LCS modality were mixed. Procedures were delayed, practical problems occurred and saving income for productive investments was not always feasible as LCS income was needed for daily subsistence and repaying debts. Moreover, the transaction costs involved in setting up and operating LCS groups were high and LCS members, especially women, were inexperienced at earthworks, whereas their performance was often compared against that of contractors. However, there were also successful groups or individuals, who ensured reasonable temporary incomes and invested in productive resources.

Due to the mixed experiences, a study on the impact of LCS work was commissioned, with an added focus on the impact for women LCS workers. The main findings of the study were:

- Consequences of the new LCS modality as per PWMR, 2014, were the reduced contract sum for LCS groups and less responsibility and ownership of the LCS group for the work now that WMGs became responsible. The intermediate role of WMGs may have caused some further delays in work orders. Anecdotal evidence suggested that LCS workers preferred direct contracts with BWDB, rather than with the WMGs.
- Late work orders often resulted in the LCS work not being completed by the monsoon. When heavy rains damaged the unfinished earthwork, workers had to put in extra unpaid hours.
- Some WMGs subcontracted all or part of the work to sardars (skilled foremen who may use machinery), taking away income sources from LCS members.
- Late work orders also resulted in LCS work coinciding with the peak agricultural season; hence the LCS work conflicted with higher paid opportunities for harvesting.
- Disagreements would sometime arise on how much work was done, and the subsequent payment received, whereas payment procedures could be slow.
- In many cases, LCS members were unaware of VAT, taxes and the service charge to WMGs, even though this was announced in the LCS information session. As a consequence, LCS members were often disappointed by the amount of payments for their work.
- There was no established mechanism to address grievances for LCS groups.
- Poverty alleviation was often only temporary. However, the provision of skill training (mainly through homestead FFS) to LCS workers seemed to have motivated their investment in productive resources, such as in poultry.
- Women's groups were often more affected by problems then men's groups. For example, they often had to carry over work until after the monsoon, because many women could only devote half-days to LCS work due to domestic responsibilities. LCS work is harsh, lacks dignity, and has a low social status. But earning income and increasing social networks empowered women

to some extent. However, LCS work did not automatically enhance women's voices and leadership, often because male WMG members took charge of managing the female LCS groups.

Considering the many challenges and the limited impact on longer-term poverty reduction, the future of LCS work needs to be reconsidered. LCS work should only be considered in more poverty-stricken areas, and when the modalities are improved, such as an earlier start of the work, better training and explanations, and easing the payment process (e.g. by bank transfers). Using a given budget for infrastructure improvements only by contractors increases the volume of work that can be realized, hence leading to more benefits for the broader population in a project area. An exception is turfing, a task that cannot be done by machines, and can be done during the slack season for agricultural work, in particular by the poorest community members, without other employment options.

Sustainability[edit | edit source]

The Blue Gold Program Document of 2012 implicitly assumed that organizing community members into Water Management Organizations would be adequate enough to ensure that the Blue Gold outcomes would be sustained after the closing of the program. This turned out to be overoptimistic, as demonstrated by the large proportion of Water Management Groups, which had been established and supported under the IPSWAM program (2003-2008), and had become inactive by the time BGP was starting up in 2013. Over time the understanding of sustainability within BGP evolved: from sustaining the WMGs and WMAs to sustaining the productive use of the improved water management system. Chapter 27 discusses sustainability in five areas: the physical environment, coping capability, the capability to maintain and improve water management, network services and risk management, also addressing the impact of disasters and resilience.

- **Physical environment**: By the end of BGP the physical status of the 22 polders has been substantially improved through rehabilitation of major infrastructure along the periphery (embankments and sluices) and an improved drainage network for internal polder water management. Whether the present status can be preserved and even expanded upon, depends on the capacity to organise water management and maintain water management infrastructure.
- **Coping capability**: Many households achieved a better income base due to increased agricultural production of field crops and/or increased homestead production. The more robust role of women in productive activities increased the resilience of their families.
- **Capability to maintain and improve water management:** The structure of WMGs and WMAs as community-based organisations enhances the voice of people in decision-making on water management, including small holder producers and women farmers. BGP made efforts to create better conditions for sustaining improved water management by:
    - More emphasis on WMAs, also in their role of keeping WMGs active
    - Strengthening the relationship between WMOs and Local Government Institutions, relevant departments and agencies as well as relevant private sector actors
    - Strengthening the relationship between WMOs and BWDB, e.g. by O&M agreements.
- Some of the linkages mentioned above depend on the success of relations between the WMOs and other organisations. And these relations are sometimes determined by events outside the control of the concerned individuals – for example, the relationship with BWDB, including OCWM, was adversely affected by BWDB's manpower and budgetary limitations. Such concerns are not specific to the Blue Gold area alone: they are to be addressed through the

Bangladesh Delta Plan.

- **Network of services**: Good services from local government institutions, departments as DAE, DoF and DoL and the private sector (input suppliers and traders) enhance sustainability. In its last years BGP gave more prominence to networking with such institutions and market actors. The capacity of especially DAE field officers (250 SAAOs) was strengthened; farmer trainers and resources farmers were promoted as a local cadre of trained resource persons for agricultural extension.
- **Risk management**: WMOs and LGIs have started to cooperate in addressing pressing risks, as illustrated by instances of joint prevention of embankment breaches during the recent cyclone Amphan in May 2020. However, a more structural approach to support disaster preparedness and climate change risks was not part of BGP's interventions and mandate.
- **Impact of and resilience to disasters**: The COVID-19 pandemic and the Amphan cyclone caused a negative impact on the Blue Gold area, undoing achievements of the earlier years: infrastructure was damaged and production and/or income levels dropped. Apart from flooding, reasons included the drop in farm gate prices and transport problems due to the lockdown measures. Migrants returned to their home villages, increasing the supply of wage labour, thus decreasing the wages, especially for women, who also experienced more domestic violence and were often more affected by shortages. But also signs of resilience were observed, such as joint awareness actions of WMGs and LGIs on COVID-19 measures, whereas increased relations with LGIs and department staff as well as the diversified (homestead) production also turned out to be helpful.

Available evidence showed that conditions for long-term sustainability of the polders and of the 'water management for development' practice improved, though it may not be enough. A future project in the coastal area therefore should from the start:

1. Support improvements in the overall water sector governance
2. Promote local action for better water management and climate smart agricultural transformation
3. Link BGP's 'water management for development' experience with the development of policies for better water sector governance, under the aegis of the Bangladesh Delta Plan.

Notes[edit | edit source]

1. ↑ A Farmer Field School (FFS) is a group-based adult learning approach through which farmers learn how to experiment and solve problems independently. The activities take place in the field during one full production cycle with a facilitator, with groups of 25 farmers, who observe from the trials, discuss, ask questions, and learn together.
2. ↑ Due to the multi-modal approach adopted for cycles 1-10

See more[edit | edit source]

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Section F: Responsible Development: Inclusion and Sustainability

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Blue Gold Program

The inclusion of the (interests of) different types of people and treating them fairly and equally, considering their different roles and interests in water management

assumed in this report to operate up to 0.5 acres (0.2 ha)

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

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

empowerment is a process, enabling people to make choices and convert these into desired actions and results. In doing so, people take control of their own lives, improve their own position, set their own agenda, gain skills, develop self-confidence, solve problems, and develop self-sufficiency. Empowerment leads to genuine participation of all actors as it is a process of gaining self-confidence for individual development as well as to contribute towards development of others.

Gender equality exists when men and women, boys and girls are attributed equal social value, equal rights and equal responsibilities; and men and women have equal access to the means (resources, opportunities) to exercise those rights and responsibilities. This does not mean that women and men will become the same, but rather that rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether someone is born male or female.

Labour Contracting Societies - Groups of usually landless people who are contracted by an agency to carry out a certain type and volume of earthwork within a given time period. For BWDB, the rules for engagement of an LCS are set down in PWMR 2014 Chapter 6

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

This is the process of systematically recognizing and taking into account gender issues (such as differences between the conditions, roles and needs of women and men) within core activities of projects and programmes and covering design, implementation and M&E. Gender mainstreaming also takes into account the likely implications for men and women of planned interventions.

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.

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

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.

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.

Collective action - by a producer group is one way to partially overcome constraints such as in weak markets, where inputs and services essential to production innovations, are generally scarce, costly to access and/or to obtain. Collective action is working in group instead of individually in order to gain economic or social benefit. Through collective action, farmers can address constraints in their market linkages, organise their activities jointly and use their collective bargaining power to reduce input costs through bulk purchase, or to obtain services from buyers such as farm-level collection of produce

Within BGP this refers to enhancing insights of especially FFS participants in how markets work, how to collect market information, facilitating linkages with market actors and increasing negotiation capacities

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Gender and Leadership Development (training)

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

The dry season (typically mid-October to mid-March) with low or minimal rainfall, high evapotranspiration rates, low temperatures and clear skies with bright sunshine. Crops grown are boro, pulses, sunflower, sesame and mungbean.

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.

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

Feminization of agriculture refers to the measurable increase of women's participation in the agricultural sector. This can be due to men taking up non-farm employment locally, male out-migration from rural areas to urban areas or abroad, poverty (need for women to raise income), and/or women's empowerment (women taking own initiatives to engage in agricultural production). The increase in agricultural productivity requiring more labour input (be it family or wage labour) can also contribute to a larger role of women in agriculture.

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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.

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

Technical Assistance

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

Bangladesh Taka

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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

Participatory Water Management Rules (2014)

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Integrated Planning for Sustainable Water Management

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.

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.

Office of the Chief of Water Management (in BWDB) responsible for the 'establishment of water user organizations, their training and participation, in project planning, implementation, operation and maintenance and cost recovery'

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

Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officer (DAE)

Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

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 strapline of the Blue Gold Program for a transformative approach to smallholder agriculture which combines water infrastructure and locally-led initiatives for better water management, using modern agricultural technology and a business-orientation.

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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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.