Summary of Section H: Innovation Fund

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The €2.45 million Blue Gold Innovation Fund (BGIF) supported the Blue Gold Program (BGP) to establish Participatory Water Management (PWM) and strengthened value chains. The BGIF funded 42 projects that proposed innovative approaches and new initiatives for the socio-economic

development of BGP's intervention areas. The solutions considered, therefore, contributed to BGP's outcomes.

The objective of the BGIF was to promote the introduction and application of innovations, both technological and conceptual. Each innovation has to be relevant to the beneficiary communities of both the Blue Gold Program, and that of the applicant implementing agencies.

Some of these innovations were adopted from other projects and organisations working inBangladesh, with Dutch knowledge institutions and private sector enterprises. The BGIF tested the relevance and effectiveness of these innovative concepts in their application and scale-up.

BGIF applicants[edit | edit source]

- **Large organisations:** produced good proposals, but they did not necessarily understand the context of BGIF. These proposals thus held no promise of realistic implementation
- **Academic organisations:** very enthusiastic and keen to pilot abstract concepts
- **Small organisations:** effective implementers with strong local networks, but weak in proposal development

Potential applicants to the BGIF were alerted of details, news, and knowledge of previous successful applicants primarily through the BGP website. Other sources of information included: announcements on sector relevant platforms, special events, newsletters, videos, and project booklets.

Lessons learnt[edit | edit source]

- **External communications on details of the fund should have been prioritised** at the operations stage of the project in order to encourage the involvement of agricultural development practitioners.
- **Horizontal Learning (HL) between BGP and BGIF projects should have been facilitated more.** BGIF projects, when harmonised with the objectives of the BGP, ensured greater learning opportunities for development programmes in the southwest region.
- **Consortia-led projects proved to be most effective.** Solicited calls for specific types of larger contracts effectively engaged more local and international organisations in submitting concept notes. The most successful projects were implemented by consortia. They were led by international NGOs, or Dutch companies, with local implementing agencies operating in the field. Both parties learnt how to clarify needs, concepts, and approaches from each other.
- **Mapping of context, constraints, and uncertainties at an earlier stage would have generated greater impacts.** The BGIF should have been clearly marked as an integral part of BGP to ensure applicants targeted BGP outcomes through their innovations. This would have been supported by the BGP itself, planning activities with an innovation fund from its inception. Clarifying what constitutes as innovative in such a programme would have generated more focussed ideas. Practitioners from a broader range of organisations in the coastal zone would have been able to participate at an earlier stage in that case. The planning should also have mapped uncertainties and gaps, and how to circumnavigate activities through that. This could then have allowed applicants to define activities more clearly. More budget should have been retained for BGIF applicants and team members to familiarise themselves with local conditions and problems.
- **Overhead and management costs are reduced if expertise is shared.** The advice of experts from the BGP team meant reduced management costs for BGIF. This also established strengthened linkages between BGPIF and BGP.

- **There should be guidelines for projects to change activities when necessary.** It was almost natural for innovation projects like those funded by the BGIF to be unable to implement all activities proposed during the planning phase. This conundrum required flexibility from both implementing agencies, and funds from managers. Problems arise when either party is too rigid and therefore become unable to react to threats and opportunities. The BGIF had attempted to avoid these pitfalls with contract addenda. These addenda attempted to compromise where entirely necessary, and ensured the efficient implementation of the grant.

See more[edit | edit source]

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Section H: Innovation Fund

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Blue Gold Innovation Fund

Blue Gold Program

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

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

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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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