
Last Mile Programme Progress report

Delivering Extension Services to the Last-Mile: Improving smallholders' access to innovation and pluralistic, demand-driven extension services

IFAD Grant: 2000001996; Recipient: GFRAS-AGRIDEA

Period: 01 January – 30 June 2020

List of acronyms

Acronym	Full reference	
AESA	Agricultural Extension in South Asia	
AFAAS	African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services	
APIRAS	Asia Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network	
AWPB	Annual Work Plan and Budget	
CF	Country For a	
CRISP	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy	
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services	
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development	
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture	
LMP	Last Mile Programme	
RAS	Rural Advisory Services	
RASP	Rural Advisory Services Providers	
RELEASE R	Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural	
RN	Regional network	
(S)RN	(Sub-)Regional Network	
USD	United States Dollar	

Table of Contents

List of acronyms	2
Table of Contents	2
Background 4	
Overall implementation progress	5
Deliverables of the Inception Phase	7
Key aspects touched upon	11
Relevance to IFAD target groups	11
Nutrition focus	12
Youth focus	12
Innovation	12
Scaling up and sustainability	12
Lessons learned and implementation issues	12
Implementation arrangements	13
Monitoring and evaluation	13
Financial and fiduciary management	14
Other information	14
Conclusions and recommendations for follow up	15

Background

This section can be maintained as such and does not need any specific inputs from CF or (S)RN

Name of grant	Delivering Extension Services to the Last-Mile: Improving smallholders' access to innovation and pluralistic, demand-driven extension services		
Name of recipient	GFRAS-AGRIDEA		
Goal, objectives and target group(s)	<p>Goal</p> <p>to contribute to the achievement of improved incomes, sustained market linkages and reduction of climate vulnerability for smallholder farmers</p> <p>Overall objective</p> <p>to enhance the capacity of public and private service providers of agricultural extension and rural advisory services to deliver services to the last mile.</p> <p>Specific objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To mobilize, organise and build the capacities of public/private RAS providers (RASPs) to deliver effective, innovative services - linked to all actors in agricultural innovation system and to smallholder farmers; • To generate and contribute knowledge needed to promote scaling up of climate resilient good practices to smallholder farmers and for promoting favourable policies and investments in RAS <p>Target groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A direct target group made of public extension service providers (ministries of agriculture and research and relevant policy and regulatory bodies), private service providers (private extension agents, input suppliers, producers, buyers, apex farmer organizations, transporters, etc.) and semi-private (socio-entrepreneurs, NGOs etc.) who offer agricultural-related services. RAS delivery agents (Government agents, private providers and semi-private providers) of IFAD supported projects will be key beneficiaries and will be incentivised to be participants of the RAS Country Fora. • An indirect target group composed of rural smallholder farmers as well as their organizations mediating access to agro-technology services and goods. A major focus will be put on women and youths. 		
Benefitting country(ies)	Reg Network	IFAD grant	Other funders
	RELASER	Colombia, Costa Rica, Grenada	One out of: Paraguay, Peru, Honduras and Brazil
	APIRAS	Bangladesh, Kirgizstan,	Laos, Fiji, Philippines

	AFAAS	Cameroon, Malawi, Kenya,	Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Madagascar, Mali, Uganda
Date of grant approval	22.11.2018		
Date of grant effectiveness	30.04.2019		
Completion date	30.06.2024		
Value of IFAD-funded grant (in US\$)	3,000,000		
Amount disbursed to date (in US\$)	USD 1,080,000 (June 2019)		
Total financing, including in-kind contribution (in US\$)	USD 3,637,000 (5 year)		

Overall implementation progress

Explanations to the table:

- a. Please report achievements per country, specific for each of the outputs, referring to the activities under the outputs indicated in the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPB)
- b. Deliverables: describe what concrete deliverables have been obtained up to date, referring to the deliverables specified in the AWPB;
- c. Progress is either “partly completed” or “fully completed”; please do not report on activities just started or about to start.
- d. Please specify how IFAD programmes and IFAD representation at country or regional level have been linked to the activities

Please highlight activities undertaken to respond to Covid-19 restrictions and present them in **green font**.

1. As per decision taken by BAEN, a draft questionnaire was prepared and sent to different experts of various public-private organizations of Bangladesh. Based on the feedback the questionnaire was revised and validated by the Executive Committee Members of BAEN through a zoom meeting on 8th May 2020. The survey was completed using Google survey, an online survey form. A total of 117 respondents including Extension & Advisory Service (EAS) providers, Agricultural University Teachers and Students of Bangladesh participated in the survey on 18th May 2020. The survey was coordinated by BAEN from design to final reporting (*Detailed can be found in the Annex-1*) and dissemination of findings Key highlights of the survey are as following;
 - Wastage and low price of vegetables, fruits, egg, milk etc. at farm gate or local market due to lack of customers, traders and vehicles for carrying the products. Vegetables and shrimp export was stopped due to closure of borders and airports. Current blockages of transport routes, transport restrictions and quarantine measures, shortages of labor, unavailability of inputs and services, and spikes in product prices interrupted the food value chain.
 - Reduced income due to marketing problem of farmer’s products and food shortage in agricultural labour households also found due to lack of work and staying at home
 - Farmers were unable to pay loans and/or access to new loans for crop cultivation and IGA activity. Complicated process to avail bank loan for agricultural activities
 - Shortage of skilled manpower and labour for vegetables and fruits transportation, marketing and harvesting/post-harvest practices of Boro rice. Shortage of labour for vegetables and fruits (sorting, grading, packaging, handling, etc.)
 - Inadequate supply of livestock, fisheries and other crop production inputs like days-old chicks, poultry feed, veterinary medicine and vaccine, seed fertilizer etc. due to restricted transport and quarantine measures
 - The lockdown situation created a huge supply shortage, resulting in higher prices of foods. Farmers Involved in vegetable cultivation are being deprived of their regular sales and income, which ultimately influences their livelihoods.

Actions undertaken to address those problem were as following;

- Honorable Prime Minister’s direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production
- Government of Bangladesh directed to implement continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security
- Making sure all time (24/7) presence of DAE staff in respective working areas
- Honorable Prime Minister’s instruction to arrange weekly haat (makeshift market) in open field in every area to help farmers for selling their produces by maintaining social distance
- Allocation of BDT. 9,000 crores as fertilizer subsidy
- Ensure hassle-free movement of farm workers travelling from one district to another especially for Boro rice harvesting
- Government decision to purchase 8 lakh ton Boro paddy @Tk26 per kg and 10 lakh ton boiled Boro rice @Tk36 per kg directly from the farmers
- Keeping vehicles loaded with fertilizers, pesticides, diesel and other agricultural produces out of lockdown
- Setting up control room by the Department of Livestock Services (DLS) to suggest the farmers

- Agril. digital apps support agricultural advisory services by the Govt /private organizations/mobile company/various projects. Upazila-wise distribution and allocation of Combine Harvester, Reaper and Rice Trans-planter with subsidy
- Stimulus package of BDT. 5,000 crores for the farmers to boost agricultural production in the backdrop of the COVID-19 fallout
- Allocation of BDT. 200 crores as incentive for purchasing agricultural machineries (especially rice harvesters). Also, allocation of BDT. 150 crores as incentive subsidy for purchasing seeds
- Continuation of existing disbursement of loans at four (04%) interest for producing spices like onions, garlic, zinger and chili, etc.
- Providing food aid and relief to daily wage earners
- Initiating control room by DoF to suggest the farmers and broadcasting nutrition related audio clips by DOF to create awareness

Way forward

Based on the above findings, following ways forward are suggested to minimize the problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 Pandemic:

- Strictly follow the Honorable Prime Minister's direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production, implement continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security and arrange weekly haat (makeshift market) in open field in every area to help farmers for selling their produces by maintaining social distance
- All time presence of Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) providers at local working areas for technical support to the farmers of crop, livestock and fisheries sectors to minimize their problems
- Effective Collaboration and Coordination among public and private Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) providers to respond to the immediate threats to Bangladesh agriculture
- Strengthen digital advisory services and provide information on output prices, availability of inputs, etc.
- Arrange proper marketing system to sell farmers' products (vegetables, fruits, egg, milk, meat, flower, shrimp, crab, etc.), so that they can be benefitted by getting fair price of their products with minimum wastage and also, arrange e-marketing system for the farmers for buying inputs and selling agro-products
- Organize proper transporting and distribution system to transport agricultural input from manufacturing and marketing companies to the local dealers and farmers
- Enhancement cooperative farming and marketing system and increase agricultural mechanization facilities for the farmers
- Providing low interest credit to farmers' groups (common interest groups formed by DAE, farmer groups of NGOs) to buy large agricultural equipment like rice harvesters with matching government subsidy so that small and marginal farmers can be able to harvest their rice as well as they can also earn money by cutting other farmers' rice
- Educate farmers about biosecurity measures such as hand washing, wearing masks, staying home if sick and maintaining social distancing
- Ensure grants from Development Partners (FAO, IFAD, other donors, development banks, etc.) for:
 2. Recommendation to face COVID -19 situation published in the social media, print media, etc
 3. Project created marketing facilities for the poor farmers to sell their products in Dhaka market as Covid disrupted the local market
 4. A series of online meeting has been conducted and made a strategic plan to cope up with the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Progress per Output

Country (a)	Key activities carried out	Deliverables obtained (b)	Progress (c) [1]	Link to IFAD programmes (d)
Component 1	Building capacities RAS providers through strengthened PPP platforms			
Output 1.1.1	1. Key stakeholders identified 2. Awareness and commitment to the project generated 3. Roles and responsibilities clarified			
<i>Bangladesh</i>	<p>- Stakeholder Consultation to mobilize service providers into PPP-make sure that multidimensional organizations such as OXFAM, SDI, BASA, iDE, ABC Start-up Co. Ltd., Practical Actions, ACI, Metal Agro Prvt. Ltd. BRAC, etc attend it.</p> <p>-Activities plan finalized and endorsed by the BAEN EC</p> <p>Formulated a project steering committee for LMP comprising of 05 members including;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Md. Afzal Hossain Bhuiayn (afzalhb1062@gmail.com) 2. Dr. Ashoke Kumer Roy (ashokebau@gmail.com;ashoke1970@gmail.com;)) 3. Masuma Younus (masumayounus@yahoo.com) 4. Md. Raju Ahmad (mdhmd62@gmail.com) 5. Dr. Sekender Ali (msa_sau@yahoo.com) <p>All of them are the member of BAEN EC. Based on the experience, potentiality, they were selected by the BAEN EC members for the project steering committee</p>	<p><i>Identified stakeholder's primary selection criteria, Signed MoU</i></p> <p><i>Approved activity plan</i></p> <p><i>Meeting minutes, decisions</i></p>	<p><i>It has been discussed in the meeting with BAEN EC members to set criteria for primary selection and stakeholder's identification, Organized event and signed MoU</i></p> <p><i>Approved plan has been followed</i></p> <p><i>Focal person selection for LMP</i></p>	<p><i>IFAD-supported programmes invited to participate</i></p>

	- Organized scheduled different meetings regularly			<i>Schedule fortnightly Zoom meeting every 2nd and 4th Saturday jointly with AESA Secretariat at 11.00am for brainstorming, regular updates and follow up on LMP from June 2020 onwards. Steering/EC committee meeting,</i>
Output : 1.1.2	1. Project baselines established 2. Monitoring indicators identified 3. M&E mechanism put in place			
	1. Identifying and applying suitable indicators based on GFRAS LMP Results framework to the context of BAEN.	M&E framework in place and GFRAS LMP results indicators finalized for the context of BAEN.	Framed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for hiring the Consultant of GFRAS LMP baseline study. Received Expression of interest/ proposals from consultants/firm Review of the proposals based upon on an agreed criteria, best is to attach the excel format in the annexure Hiring process is ongoing	M&E framework from other country, funded by IFAD used to develop M&E system in Bangladesh
Output.1.1.3	1. Road map to strengthening CF laid out 2. Budget requirement to implement Strategic Plan estimated 3. Required capacities to achieve maturity identified			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing short- and medium-term priorities/capacity assessment of BAEN for PPP platform for last mile delivery • Review of the strategic plan and development of guidelines formats and operationalizing mechanisms for strengthening organisational capacity of BAEN. • Meeting of the Interim Steering committee and executive body and approving the legal framework and formation of new committee (BAEN to raise additional resources/support from CF for conducting this meeting) 	<p>A maturity index is drafted to be endorsed and finalized by the BAEN EC</p> <p>Finalized the activity plan as part of PPP platform</p>	<p>BAEN EC meeting completed to design key activities to be undertaken as part of PPP platform</p> <p>IFAD representative has enrolled in the BAEN Executive Committee to participate in the decision making process and policy development</p>	<p>IFAD representative has enrolled in the BAEN Executive Committee to buy-in in the decision making process</p>
<p>Output 1.1.4</p>	<p>Training module developed and tested on 'Strengthening pluralism in RAS delivery and the role of PPP' for senior managers in RAS organisations</p>			
	<p>CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR PPP in RAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Training module on 'Strengthening pluralism in RAS delivery and the role of PPP' for senior managers in RAS organisations 	<p>ToR is there as of now</p>	<p>Completed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for hiring the Consultant of GFRAS LMP PPP status and strategy paper.</p> <p>Received proposals from consultants and reviewed based upon the criteria vetted by the project steering committee</p> <p>Currently in the process of review of proposals and finalisation</p>	<p>PPP strategy papers expected to be endorsed by the IFAD representative</p>

Output 1.1.5	<p>1. Status paper on PPP in RAS in Bangladesh developed as a guidance document.</p> <p>2. Guideline paper on RAS-PPP printed and disseminated</p> <p>3. Key stakeholders trained on PPP development and its processes</p>			
	<p>POLICY DIALOGUE FOR PPP in RAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a status paper on PPP in RAS in Bangladesh • Develop a 4-6-page bilingual policy brief (layout, editing, translational, printing of 1000 copies of policy brief) • ToR drafted, approved and published in Website and communicated with the potential consultants 	Approved ToR	Completed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for hiring the Consultant of GFRAS LMP PPP status and strategy paper. ToR Published BAEN website. Currently the hiring process is ongoing	NA
2. Covid Response	<p>10 Good practice notes written and finalized"</p> <p>Develop a new section within the BAEN website and develop 10 bi lingual knowledge products available to local users (best practices, blogs, press release, analysis of existing programmes that have to be modified, what different organizations within the network can deliver)</p>			
	<p>CONTENT GENERATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to challenges faced by farmers and leveraging the country fora platform for resolving many of these issues 	<p>Case study on COVID-19 cope up strategy is in place.</p> <p>3 Blog published in aesanetwork.org/blog (Blog 127-Covid 19 Impact on Farmers in Bangladesh: Findings from the Baen Survey); Blog-114-Ways to overcome the effects of covid19 on Bangladesh Agriculture);</p>	<p>A case study on COVID cope up strategy has been made in support of BAEN CF member to capture good practice on continuation of production and sales during the COVID pandemic</p>	<p>LMP taken measures as IFAD focused on addressing Covid-19 pandemic situation</p>

		Blog-94-Farm Business Advisor-The Missing Link for Farmers) Stories post under process to be reported in the next report		
2.1	BAEN website and portal operational and maintained			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation for ICT Tools and platforms for the last mile • Upgrading, maintaining the BAEN web portal two times in the period Dec19-20 • Conducted several meeting with the website designer • Conducted meeting within BAEN EC and LMP steering committee • Shared and took valuable suggestions from AESA 	Agreement with vendor , draft website, content upload	A discussion and negotiation meeting has been completed with a web designer to renovate and maintain/ upgrade the BAEN website http://baenbd.org/ . Decision made in the BAEN EC	NA
2.2	BAEN's website regularly updated and knowledge shared with RAS providers through social media			
	<p>ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION</p> <p>Using BAEN website to continuously update relevant content and communicate through social media with policy makers, professionals engaged in PPP in RAS and the last mile delivery through RAS stakeholders through a social media facilitator -social media updates, website updates</p>	Content uploaded, story developed and uploaded	Covid response published in the social media/news papers. Also, the case study on COVID cope up strategy has been made	NA
2.3	BAEN network members updated and engaged on a regular basis			

	Operationalizing the network, coordination and general coordination: Salaries/Consultancy support	Conducted several Zoom meeting, shared covid response strategy	Conducted meetings with partner organizations to share project activities and their role in implementation of the GFRAS LMP project. The meeting was organized virtually using Zoom in participation with CF and regional level AES member	NA
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Key aspects touched upon

For each of the aspects indicated below, please provide as much as possible specific information (referring to concrete examples). Consider how these aspects have been touched upon through the choice of topics of activities or the way activities have been implemented, in strategies or methodologies developed etc.

Relevance to IFAD target groups (smallholder farmers, poor)

LMP follows IFAD guidelines and has been working with the organization's that are engaged with IFAD granted funds and working with the smallholder and poor farmers.

Gender focus

BAEN members are working with a number of women farmers' groups established by the NGOs supported by IFAD and non-IFAD funded projects. The approach of farmers groups especially with women make them skill and knowledgeable on agriculture and farm management activity. Also, it brings both women and men to learn together useful for their farm activity and livelihood as well. Both women and men can act as a supporting hand for each other due to jointly participating in the meeting. BAEN would build in a gender lens for all its activities and promote equal opportunities for training and capacity strengthening of extension agents whether they are men or women and try to be more inclusive for women farmers in its interventions.

Environment and climate focus

BAEN as a CF has a focus on sustainability and helping farmers adapt to climate change. During the IFAD funded SAAS project (2016-2019) BAEN developed module on 'Adaptation to Climate Change in Agriculture' to train extensionists help farmers cope and adapt to climate change. This was pilot tested in 2019. Partner NGOs who are part of the BAEN platform are promoting sustainable agriculture practices (Organic farming, IPM, Sac bag, tower garden.) both in the input and output market by engaging private sector partners. BAEN partners also support to ensure the product and service at consumers' doorstep which helps them to buy and use this for their agricultural farm. This approach also helps in reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection for the producers.

Nutrition focus

Gender and nutrition is a priority for BAEN programmes and during the LMP would be keeping this in its focus. BAEN Story of Change (1), prepared on the case of Prity 16 years young girls who was capacitated by iDE (BAEN partner) under the Suchana project funded by DFID and EU. The story shows how she contributed and enhanced the nutritional security due to the PPP for 150 families which is work in progress. BAEN would be publishing knowledge products to highlight this dimension

Youth focus

BAEN Executive committee has a youth member from YPARD has been actively working . BAEN has focus on youth and mobilizing frontline extension workers to connect youth with the agricultural work to reduce their employment risk. Different member organizations of BAEN are also taking intervention to build youth

as an entrepreneur across the Country. BAEN Story of Change (1) prepared on the case of Prity who is an adolescent girl, became an entrepreneur by BAEN partner as part of youth engagement in agriculture. The project will be promoting youth as an entrepreneur and change maker in the agriculture of Bangladesh in collaboration with BAEN and its partner organizations.

Innovation

BAEN is a platform to boost up innovation through its activities in the EAS in the country. BAEN partnered with a number of public-private, NGOs, civil society partner organizations. BAEN arranges field visit to capture innovative idea, approach, technology which are assessed by the expert to award the best one. BAEN also disseminate those best practices across the partners as part of replication strategy.

Knowledge management and Communication

A case study on the COVID cope up strategy developed in support of CF members and published in the website and other social media as a best practice.

- Contributed to knowledge products to AESA-BAEN joint blogs on response to COVID-19
- Many other knowledge products work in progress
- Stories of change-coming up

Scaling up and sustainability

BAEN is committed to scaling up through sharing good practices and experiences for learning from each other in EAS and principles of sustainability.

Lessons learned and implementation issues

Please indicate here lessons learned regarding topics dealt with, regarding approaches to implement activities or foster collaboration (e.g. with IFAD). Indicate areas of project management needing specific attention. In particular, indicate here or in the following section the restrictions and issues around implementation due to Covid-19 and the arrangements made to assure proper implementation.

Virtual meetings using online apps like Zoom, Skype, Google meet can be an important way of arranging meetings timely with optimum number of participants. This does not require travelling, delayed start etc. cause time saving. The participant who has an appropriate device i.e. laptop or android phone can be easily connected for a meeting. A meeting can be organized with short notice. Little bit faced challenges to communicate at wider level including donor organizations.

Implementation arrangements

Please indicate here whether specific measures have been taken to optimise implementation of the activities, to foster collaboration and synergies with other programmes. In particular, indicate the arrangements made to assure implementation under the restrictions and issues due to Covid-19

Number of virtual meetings using Zoom link completed with the CF and regional level to exchange learning on COVID impact in the extension work. The meeting helps get into a practical scenario which had been faced by farmers during COVID pandemic. The CF members are currently familiar with the online link for participating in the virtual meeting to be undertaken in future to boost up the project activity implementation. Due to Covid farmers were unable to sell their products, in this situation projects facilitated to ensure marketing of their products in Dhaka city. Conducted zoom meeting among steering committee members, EC members of BAEN as required and taken decision for implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation

Indicate here activities carried out with regard to M&E by (S)RN and CF during the reporting period and mention key results of these activities. For instance, CF organised a virtual meeting to familiarise its Board with the M&E methodology.

A meeting completed with 15 Executive Committee (EC) members of BAEN to share GFRAS LMP project M&E framework i.e. indicators in order to make them clear about the project's expected results to be achieved. After the baseline survey, another event will be organized to validate the result.

Financial and fiduciary management

This section will be filled out by GFRAS Secretariat

<i>Expenditure category</i>	<i>Budget reporting period (USD)</i>	<i>Expenses reporting period (USD)</i>	<i>Variance</i>
1 Sub-grants			
2 Salaries and allowances			
3 Travel and allowances			
4 Consultancies			
5 Workshops			
6 Training			
7 Operational			
Total use IFAD funds			

Other information

Please list any other information within or outside the programme considered important for the implementation of LMP.

Conclusions and recommendations for follow up

Conclusions reflect your general appreciation of programme implementation during the reporting period, it may contain multiple statements (e.g.: irregular communication between (S)RN and GFRAS has delayed implementation; agreements between (S)RN and CF satisfactorily followed)

Recommendations refer to suggestion on how to further optimize the implementation, they can stem from lessons learned or other observations and experiences made during implementation (e.g.: reporting process needs to be better adapted to specific conditions)

During the reporting period, COVID-19 has impacted significantly on the implementation of project activities. The virtual meeting using the Zoom link helps in overcoming those challenges to some extent. More virtual meeting to be organized to address longer term COVID pandemic through necessary capacity building of the CF members based on the requirement. Best story on Covid, KM products and best approaches must share among the stakeholders using social media, online platform and other media.

Annexes/Appendices

Annex-1: COVID-19 survey report

INITIATIVES TO MINIMIZE THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE FARMERS OF BANGLADESH DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Strictly following the Honorable Prime Minister's direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production & implementing continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security; all time presence of Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) providers at local working areas for technical support to the farmers; and effective collaboration & Coordination among public and private EAS providers can minimize the problems faced by the Farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 Pandemic, opined by the EAS providers of Bangladesh as reported by Prof. Dr. Md. Sekender Ali.

CONTEXT

COVID-19 pandemic is serious in the world as well as in Bangladesh. All the sub-sectors of agriculture (crop, livestock and fisheries) in Bangladesh are facing serious problems due to COVID-19 pandemic. AESA website published two Blogs (AESA Blog 114 and 108) about the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on Bangladesh agriculture. Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) providers of Bangladesh should come together to respond to the immediate threats to Bangladesh agriculture caused due to COVID-19. As per suggestions from AESA Blog 114, the society for Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN) decided to conduct an online survey to assess the competency of initiatives by different organization of Bangladesh to minimize the problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 pandemic.

As per decision taken by BAEN, a draft questionnaire was prepared containing open ended questions. These were sent to different experts of Bangladesh and India specially the Members of BAEN and AESA for their comments. As per their comments, again a draft questionnaire was prepared with the combination of closed form and open form questions whenever necessary. These were again sent to the relevant experts for their corrections. Accordingly, after getting several corrections and modifications, the draft questionnaire was further modified. The modified questionnaire was validated by the Executive Committee Members of BAEN by arranging a zoom meeting on 08 May 2020. After the meeting, necessary corrections, modifications, additions and deletions were made on the questionnaire. Then the final version of the survey questionnaire was prepared. Google survey was used to conduct this online survey.

Extension & Advisory Service (EAS) providers, Agricultural University Teachers & Students and others from all level of Bangladesh were requested to response to the questionnaire by 18 May 2020. Accordingly, 117 respondents participated in the online survey. Based on their responses, the results of this survey were prepared.

Problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 pandemic

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, farmers of Bangladesh are facing different types of problems in a various degree. Initially problem items were collected from the news of different print and electronic media and from thorough consultation with relevant experts and EAS providers. These were sent to different experts of Bangladesh and India for their comments. As per their comments, the items were rearranged. These were again sent to the relevant experts and EAS providers for their corrections. Accordingly, after getting several corrections and modifications, the items were further modified. The modified items were validated by the Executive Committee Members of BAEN by arranging a zoom meeting on 08 May 2020. After the meeting, necessary corrections, modifications, additions and deletions were made on the items. Finally, 28 items were selected for the study.

Respondents were asked to mention their opinion on the degree of problem faced by the farmers on the selected problem items due to COVID-19 pandemic by highlighting the correct response among the four alternative responses as ‘severe problem’, ‘moderate problem’, ‘low problem’ and ‘no problem’. As per responses from 117 respondents, Rank Order of the problems was prepared based on the magnitude of the problems. Items were rearranged on the basis of the rank order as shown in Box 1.

Box 1. Rank Order of the problems faced by the farmers due to COVID-19 pandemic

Severe problems

- Wastage and low price of vegetables and fruits at farm gate or local market due to disconnect with the customer, absence of traders (middle men as collectors, transporters wholesalers, etc.) and vehicles for transport
- Low price of egg, milk, meat, etc. at farm and local markets due to reduced customer footfall, traders and vehicles
- Losses of export quality vegetables due to closure of borders and airports
- Wastage of flowers in farmers' field as there are no customers, traders, collectors, transporters and vehicles
- Losses of shrimp cultivators and exporters due to closure of borders and airports
- Losses of crab and mud eel producers, and dri fish and frozen fish exporters due to closure of borders and airports
- Reduced income due to marketing problem of farmers products
- Food shortage in agricultural labour households due to lack of work and staying at home
- Mango and Litchi farmers and traders may be looser due to marketing problem
- Low price of fish products at farm and local markets due to reduced customer footfall, traders and vehicles
- Inability of farmers to pay loan installments and non-availability of new loan for cultivation and farms
- Shortage of skilled manpower and labour for vegetables and fruits transporting and marketing
- Shortage of labour for harvesting and post-harvest practices of boro rice
- Complex procedure of Bank to take loan for agricultural activities
- Inadequate supply of livestock production inputs like days-old chicks, poultry feed, veterinary medicine and vaccine, etc. due to restricted transport and quarantine measures
- Shortage of labour for Post-harvest practices of vegetables and fruits (sorting, grading, packaging, handling, etc.)
- Farmers have to pay more for buying inputs and food staff which increases their family expenses
- Shortage of labour for livestock (poultry, cow, goat, milk, meat, egg, etc.) production
- Inadequate supply of fisheries production inputs like fish seed, feed, medicine, vaccine, equipment, etc. due to restricted transport and quarantine measures
- Shortage of food grain, vegetables, fruits, egg, milk, fish, etc. in big cities due to short supply of agricultural products from fields and local markets
- Shortage of Harvester for boro rice harvesting
- Inadequate supply of crop production inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. due to restricted transport and quarantine measures

Moderate Problems

- Affecting Farmers' health due to COVID-19 & other diseases and lowering working ability in the field
- Shortage of labour for fisheries production
- Inadequate pest control in fields due to shortage of pesticides and labour for cultural operations and preventive measures
- Less agricultural extension services as because since extension personnel are less visiting the growers' fields as well as less attending to offices due to a fear of infecting coronavirus
- Inadequate irrigation facilities due to lack of spare parts of irrigation equipment, technical persons and labour
- Lack of Aus rice seeds as per farmers' demand for the next season

Findings revealed that among the 28 problems, 22 problems were severe and rest 6 were moderate problems (Box 1.). From the findings, it was also found that problems related to “Wastage and low price of farmers’ products (vegetables, fruits, egg, milk, meat, flower, shrimp, crab, etc.) at farm gate or local market due to disconnect with the customer, absence of traders (middle men as collectors, transporters wholesalers, etc.) and vehicles for transport” were identified as the top ranked problem. Severity position of all the problems may be seen in Box 1. Ali (2020) mentions 11 effects of COVID-19 on Bangladesh agriculture on his early study at the very begging stage of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Roy (2020) also found similar findings in his studies. Print and electronic media are also broadcasting similar problems regularly.

Initiatives taken by different organizations to minimize the problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Different organizations of Bangladesh have taken several initiatives to minimize the problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 pandemic. Competencies of the initiatives were in a various degree. Initially initiative items were collected from the news of different print and electronic media and from thorough consultation with relevant experts and EAS providers. These were sent to different experts of Bangladesh and India for their comments. As per their comments, the items were rearranged. These were again sent to the relevant experts and EAS providers for their corrections. Accordingly, after getting several corrections and modifications, the items were further modified. The modified items were validated by the Executive Committee Members of BAEN by arranging a zoom meeting on 08 May 2020. After the meeting, necessary corrections, modifications, additions and deletions were made on the items. Finally, 26 items were selected for the study.

Respondents were asked to mention their opinion on the degree of competency of the initiatives taken by different organizations of Bangladesh to minimize the problems faced by the farmers due to COVID-19 pandemic by highlighting the correct response among the four alternative responses as ‘highly competent’, ‘moderate competent’, ‘low competent’ and ‘not competent’. As per responses from 117 respondents, Rank Order of the initiatives was prepared based on the magnitude of competencies. Items of initiatives were rearranged on the basis of the rank order as shown in Box 2.

Findings revealed that among the 26 initiatives, five (5) were highly competent and rest 21 were moderate competent (Box 2.). From the findings, it was also found that initiatives related to “Honorable Prime Minister’s direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production, implement continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security and arrange weekly haat (makeshift market) in open field in every area to help farmers for selling their produces by maintaining social distance; all time presence of DAE staff in respective working areas and allocation of BDT. 9,000 crore as fertilizer subsidy” were identified as the top ranked initiatives i.e. the highly competent initiatives. Competency position of all the initiative items may be seen in Box 2. Ali (2020) reported more or less similar initiatives in his study at the early starting stage of COVID-19 Pandemic. Roy (2020) also found similar findings in his studies. Print and electronic media are also broadcasting similar initiatives regularly.

Box 2. Rank Order of the initiatives taken to minimize the problems faced by the farmers due to COVID-19 pandemic

Highly competent Initiatives

- Honorable Prime Minister's direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production
- Honorable Prime Minister's direction to implement continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security
- Ensuring all time (24 hours of each day of each week) presence of DAE staff in respective work areas
- Honorable Prime Minister's instruction to arrange weekly haat (makeshift market) in open field in every area to help farmers for selling their produces by maintaining social distance
- Allocation of BDT. 9,000 crore as fertilizer subsidy

Moderate Competent Initiatives

- Ensure hassle-free movement of farm workers travelling from one district to another especially for boro rice harvesting
- Government decision to purchase 8 lakh ton Boro paddy @Tk26 per kg and 10 lakh ton boiled Boro rice @Tk36 per kg directly from the farmers
- Keeping vehicles loaded with fertilizers, pesticides, diesel and other agricultural produces out of lockdown
- Distributing seed of BINA-19 rice variety by Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) for kharif season and providing suggestions for its cultivation
- Setting up control room by the Department of Livestock Services (DLS) to suggest the farmers
- Agril. digital apps support for agricultural advisory services by the Govt /private organizations/mobile company/various projects
- Allowing people's movement engaged in crop harvesting and facilitating food and agricultural input supply chain
- Upazilla-wise distribution and allocation of Combined Harvester, Reaper and Rice Trans planter with subsidy
- Executing necessary measures to enhance Kharif-1 production
- Stimulus package of BDT. 5,000 crore for the farmers to boost agricultural production in the backdrop of the COVID-19 fallout
- Distribution of VGF Rice to farm families of 20 districts by the Department of Fisheries (DOF) as Humanity Assistance Program
- Government incentive for thunder arrested dead people
- Initiating monitoring cell by BADC for emergency situation to preserve Boro seed and distribution of Aus seeds across the country
- Allocation of BDT. 200 crore as incentive for purchasing agricultural machineries (especially rice harvesters)
- Irrigation incentive for the farmers provided by BADC
- Allocation of BDT. 150 crore as incentivesubsidy for purchasing seeds
- Continuation of existing disbursement of loans at four (04%) interest for producing spices like onions, garlic, zinger and chili, etc.
- Providing food aid and relief to daily wage earners
- Credit support by NGOs for farming activities
- Initiating control room by DOF to suggest the farmers
- Broadcasting nutrition related audio clips by DOF to create awareness

WAYS FORWARD TO MINIMIZE THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE FARMERS OF BANGLADESH DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Based on the above findings, following ways forward are suggested to minimize the problems faced by the farmers of Bangladesh due to COVID-19 Pandemic:

- Strictly follow the Honorable Prime Minister's direction to cultivate every inch of land for more crop production, implement continuous agricultural activities for ensuring food security and arrange weekly haat (makeshift market) in open field in every area to help farmers for selling their produces by maintaining social distance
- All time presence of Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) providers at local working areas for technical support to the farmers of crop, livestock and fisheries sectors to minimize their problems
- Effective Collaboration and Coordination among public and private Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) providers to respond to the immediate threats to Bangladesh agriculture
- Strengthen digital advisory services and provide information on output prices, availability of inputs, etc.
- Arrange proper marketing system to sell farmers' products (vegetables, fruits, egg, milk, meat, flower, shrimp, crab, etc.), so that they can be benefitted by getting fair price of their products with minimum wastage
- Arrange e-marketing system for the farmers for buying inputs and selling agro-products
- Organize proper transport system for marketing of farmers' products
- Organize proper transporting and distribution system to transport agricultural input from manufacturing and marketing companies to the local dealers and farmers
- Proper monitoring and distribution of government subsidies, grants, incentives, credit, etc. for the betterment of the farmers
- Enhancement cooperative farming and marketing system
- Ensure migration of agricultural labour with proper health care from surplus areas to the deficit areas of the country
- Increase agricultural mechanization facilities for the farmers
- Providing low interest credit to farmers' groups (common interest groups formed by DAE, farmer groups of NGOs) to buy large agricultural equipment like rice harvesters with matching government subsidy so that small and marginal farmers can be able to harvest their rice as well as they can also earn money by cutting other farmers' rice
- Educate farmers about biosecurity measures such as hand washing, wearing masks, staying home if sick and maintaining social distancing
- Ensure vehicle, insurance, incentive, PPE, sanitizer products, etc. for EAS personnel
- Ensure grants from Development Partners (FAO, IFAD, other donors, development banks, etc.) for:
 - Increasing the capacity of the EAS providers
 - Vehicle subsidy for transporting farmers products from farmers field to big cities
 - Increasing capacity of small and marginal farmers to buy agricultural implements
 - Establish low cost cold storage facilities at farmers areas

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- Ali, M. S. 2020. Ways to overcome the Effects of Covid-19 on Bangladesh Agriculture. AESA Blog 114
- Roy, R. 2020. Mitigating Impact of COVID-19 on Food and Agriculture in Bangladesh. AESA Blog 108

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