

Minutes of the 10th Plenary Meeting
Working Group of the Local Consultative Group for
Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development (LCG-AFSRD)

Chair: Mr. Md Nasiruzzaman, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture
Co-Chair: Mr. Robert D. Simpson, FAO Representative in Bangladesh
Venue: Online Zoom meeting initiated from the conference room, Ministry of Agriculture
Date and time: 28 April 2020, 10 a.m. to 12:10 p.m.

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introduction by Ministry of Agriculture and FAO
2. Confirmation of minutes of the 9th LCG-AFSRD meeting
3. Status of progress of decision of the 9th LCG meeting
4. Priority actions to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture inputs, field crops and horticulture crops
5. Presentation of programmes and initiatives taken by Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) on behalf of DPs to address the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture
6. Presentation of FAO's assessment methodology on the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture food security and nutrition
7. Open discussion
8. Miscellaneous(if any)
9. Closing remarks

Mr Md. Nasiruzzaman, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Chair of the LCG-AFSRD, welcomed all participants to the 10th LCG meeting taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic. He acknowledged the role and continuous support of the Development Partners (DPs) in the journey of development in agriculture, food security, and nutrition in Bangladesh. The on-going pandemic has led to loss of lives and assets across the world and Bangladesh. He said that at present Boro rice is at the harvesting stage. This is a vital crop and we shall have to harvest it successfully. Government is well ahead with necessary support to the farmers, he mentioned. He said that more than 60% of the boro paddy has already been harvested and government provided paddy reapers and combined harvesters to the farmer to expedite the harvesting process. Movement of agriculture workers from the other districts to the haor region had been facilitated by various support from the government administration and hope that we will be able to harvest the crop successfully, he mentioned.

Mr. Md. Nasiruzzaman emphasized the importance of conducting a quick impact assessment on the effect of the pandemic to crops, fisheries, and livestock and requested FAO to lead the study in collaboration with Development Partners. He added that DPs should come forward with projects to support the agriculture sector and to work together with MoA during this emergency situation. Our farmers urgently need support to receive agricultural inputs for maintaining the next crop production cycle and government is conscious about the issues. Development Partners should come up with their interventions. With this background speech, the honourable chair requested honourable co-chair to deliver his speech.

Mr. Robert D. Simpson, FAO Representative in Bangladesh, expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the Chair and MoA for arranging this meeting under such a critical situation. He appreciated the participants for their gracious presence and excellent support. He thanked all of the development partners for standing together. He emphasized DP's need to provide technical support during this global challenge and to keep the agricultural supply chain open to ensure food security and nutrition for the people. For common understanding about the current situation this is an opportunity to listen, share and explore thoughts of different DPs, government and NGOs working for the development of food security and nutrition of the country. At this moment, it is not only sufficient to produce more food but also to ensure supply of nutritious food for the people of Bangladesh. We can investigate how to support the vulnerable farmers of Bangladesh under the leadership of MoA.

The honorable Chair then requested the anchor to proceed following the agenda of the meeting.

Discussion:

Agenda 1: Confirmation of minutes of the 9th LCG-AFSRD meeting

Ms. Maksuma Akter, Deputy Secretary (IC-2), MoA, read out the decisions of the 9th meeting and progress towards implementation of the decisions. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the extent of progress and achievement on the decisions. Therefore, 9th LCG-AFSRD Meeting Resolution has been confirmed.

Agenda 2: Status of progress of decision of the 9th LCG Meeting

Ten decisions were taken in the 9th LCG meeting held on, 27th February, 2020. Due to COVID-19 and country-wide vacation, communication disruptions and lockdown started from 25th March 2020, no significant progress was achieved. However,

Agenda 3: Priority actions to address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture, inputs, field crops and horticulture crops

Dr. Md Abdur Rouf, Additional Secretary (PPC), MoA, delivered a brief presentation on priority actions to address the problems created by COVID-19 in the agricultural sector. He mentioned that the role of agriculture is important in enhancing productivity, profitability and employment generation in the rural areas for improving the wellbeing of vast population. The COVID-19 pandemic is already directly affecting food systems through impacts on food supply, demand, and indirectly through decreases in purchasing power. The capacity to produce and distribute food, and the intensification of care tasks, all of which will have differentiated impacts and will more strongly affect the poor and vulnerable. Movement restrictions necessary to contain the spread of the virus simultaneously threaten to disrupt the entire food supply chain – from production to processing, packaging, transporting, marketing and consumption. This would leave already vulnerable populations facing a growing reality of even further constrained access to food due to shortages, high food prices and curtailed incomes. Labour shortages could further disrupt the food supply chain, while informal labourers will be hard hit by job and income losses.

At present the development trend in value chain management (contract farming, improved market management, organizing growers of high value produce, capacity building of growers in Good Agriculture Practice, branding, transaction, processing and value addition) may continue profit to farming activities, though expected to be less. With business unusual case, with enhanced threat of corona virus situation with aggressive effect in the production process with resilient farming system may affect the supply lines, particularly output market. However, scaling up of quality input supply and increasing grip of the hazard management by different actors (with better understanding of the management of virus synchronized with knowledge and logistics) may help in increasing production and getting off the sudden price fall at the producer level.

In such critical context both short and long term measures are very much required. Investing in safeguarding livelihoods and food production and access at the very onset of the crisis will be critical to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment efforts. This will also have a high return of investment in terms of securing food access and reducing the need for sustained food assistance. Considering all the above aspects following key priority measures are needed to be well addressed to face the challenges created by COVID-19 in crop subsector in Bangladesh:

- To assess the overall impact of COVID-19 on crop subsector;
- Continuing and scaling-up (as needed) distributions of quality agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, machineries, pesticides & credit facilities);
- Ensuring timely supply of quality seed from both home and abroad for Kharif-I, Kharif-II and next Rabi season;
- Supporting livelihood diversification and home-based food production (e.g. backyard gardens) to ensure further fresh food availability and income;
- Reducing post-harvest losses;
- Ensuring safeguard of the health of farmers and food workers across the whole value chain in compliance with national public health mitigation measures;

- Supporting food processing, transport, marketing, storing with specific focus on vulnerable smallholder farmers food workers;
- Mobilizing communities and raising COVID-19 awareness through Farmer Groups;
- Training local authorities, extension personnel, farmer groups, women and youth groups on safeguard and best practices to mitigate risk of infection; and
- Developing Digital Marketing Platform.

Ministry priority area : Research and Development; Agro-processing; Agricultural Marketing; Value Chain Development; Efficient use of Agricultural Inputs; Mechanization; Soil Health Management; Post Harvest Management(Yield gap minimize); Prioritization /extension of Green Technologies; Water economy/Efficient use of water; Entrepreneurship development, etc.

Agenda 4: Presentation of programs and initiatives taken by Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) on behalf of DPs to address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture

Dr. **Timothy J. Krupnik**, Country Representative for Research and Partnerships, CIMMYT, briefly presented an overview of the programme and initiatives taken by the CGIAR centers—including CIMMYT, IFPRI, IRRI, and WorldFish—under perspective of COVID-19 pandemic. He said that a rapid survey is going on regarding perishable items, horticulture, fisheries, poultry, mechanized harvesting, labour, and price distortion issues. Initial data indicate that the supply chain of feed has been distorted, consequently the livestock and also dairy sectors are likely to be affected. CGIAR has initiatives through projects and in response to COVID to collect data on agricultural productivity, labor dynamics, nutrition, and is assisting in advising for safe supply chain management. Additional concerns are for the service sectors: the hotel industry and food industry are also affected by COVID-19, he mentioned. He said that CGIAR is acting globally under a one CGIAR approach as a research centre and conducting global level cloud sourcing, critical data supply and recommending high level policy issues with other development partners to reduce the impact of COVID-19. Details of these topics can be found in the Appended letter sent by the CGIAR centers to **Mr Md. Nasiruzzaman**, Honorable Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and leadership of respective line-agencies within the Ministry of Agriculture, on April 20, 2020.

On behalf of WorldFish, Dr. Tim informed that they are also conducting telephonic survey on fish supply chain to find out impact of COVID-19 in the fisheries sector. Finally he suggested for taking initiative to:

- Ensure medium-term access to finance for rural and urban poor
- Delivering seeding equipment and crop harvesting machineries
- Taking initiative to ensure supply of maize seed for the next cropping season
- Enhancing price monitoring system and responses plan for agricultural commodities and inputs

Dr. **Akhter Ahmed**, Country Representative, IFPRI, mentioned that in response to the low paddy price during Boro paddy procurement last year, the Ministry of Agriculture commissioned IFPRI

to conduct a study to (1) assess to what extent boro farmers could sell their paddy to the Government at the announced procurement price in 2019; (2) evaluate the efficacy of the direct paddy procurement; and (3) examine ways to improve the procurement system. IFPRI submitted the report to the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, IFPRI is planning a series of telephone surveys, which will collect information from low-income households (landless daily wage laborers, rickshaw/van pullers, transport workers, etc.); farmers (particularly smallholder farmers); traders/businesses (particularly small traders and actors in the aquaculture, rice, vegetable, livestock, and pulses value chains); and capture the gendered impacts of COVID-19. The surveys will explore what kinds of economic shocks these households are facing, the size and nature of internal labour migration, what type of assistance they are receiving, and so on. Currently, many people need assistance who did not face such problems before. These groups of people are adopting negative coping strategies by eating less food and selling their productive assets, which can create long-term impacts on poverty.

Dr. Humnath Bhandari, IRRI Representative Bangladesh mentioned that IRRI is conducting some micro-level activities to identify the short-term and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on rice farming system:

- Telephone surveys to understand the challenges faced by farmers, dealers, consumers
- What is the market situation? What are available in the market and what are the challenges?

He said that they assume 20% to 30% increase of rice price, during ramadan onion and rice prices are higher. It is expected that successful harvest of Boro rice will reduce the market price of rice, he mentioned. Mr. Bhandari also informed that as a research organisation, they are observing Global Import - Export price scenarion of rice. IRRI is looking at China and India's export and import status; policies taken by Philippines, Indonesia and other major rice exporting countries and doing the global rice price scenario analysis. He said that IRRI is continuing policy brief and blogs: what is happening globally in 2020 and other Challenges of Aus paddy production in coming season. Finally Mr. Bhandari assured that IRRI is committed to support the government and will be beside MoA whenever needed.

In summary, the CGIAR centers reiterated their unique position as a consortium of research institutions conducting agricultural production and policy research in the country. They reinforced their commitment to assist the Government of Bangladesh in planning and implementing appropriate COVID-19 responses from a food systems angle.

Agenda 5 Presentation on the FAO's assessment methodology on impact of COVID-19 in agriculture food security and nutrition.

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Mr. Robert D Simpson, FAO Representative in Bangladesh, made a brief presentation on the rapid impact assessment of COVID-19 on the agriculture food security and nutrition of Bangladesh. He explained the overall objective as follows:

- Identify and monitor risks to food and nutrition security stemming from COVID-19 and develop subsequent control measures
- Inform humanitarian and resilience programming, investments in the food system and policy interventions:
 - Impacts on farmers
 - Price changes at farm gate and markets
 - Understand vulnerabilities in supply chains/food systems
 - Effects on consumers and impacts on farmers
 - To add to the body of knowledge and support development of an overall coordinated COVID-19 response plan for food systems

Based on the initial findings he mentioned some of the key issues as follows:

Immediate actions:

- Get the current crop successful
- Support open supply chains
- Agricultural stimulus package for harvest hit sectors-targeted at small holders
- Upscaling of social protection
- Develop response plan

Longer-term actions:

- Plan for September planting
- Understand forces behind volatile prices and input supplies
- Shorten supply chains
- Fiscal and financial support
- Policy implementation-commercialization, mechanization and diversification

Before closing, Mr. Simpson provided several recommendations on how the LCG WG members could move forward on establishing a joint effort to assess and monitor the current food security and agriculture situation including:

- Distribute draft of the report to LCG WG members for a quick peer review
- Establish a small sub-committee to review methodology, gaps in data, method to expand primary data collection (possibly jointly by FAO, WFP, IFAD and CGIAR organizations) and complete a desk study
- Periodic update to the report for assessment and monitoring

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- Development of a food security and agriculture response plan that would be an evolving document

Finally, he welcomed comments and suggestions on the methodology and other relevant issues of survey.

Agenda 6: Open discussion

Mr. Md. Nasiruzzaman mentioned that Bangladesh Bank announced 25 thousand crore BDT stimulus package of loan at 4% interest for the greater agriculture sector. Under the COVID-19 situation online marketing may be one of the innovative solutions. It's very urgent to make sheds for the farmers market in "Shech Bhaban", seed supply issue is important, poultry and fisheries sector need some more attention. He mentioned the recent initiatives taken by MoA. With this short statement he opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Asif Saleh, Executive Director, BRAC Bangladesh, mentioned that dairy farmers are struggling as all companies except BRAC reduced their buying price and under this circumstance he wanted to know that is there a policy response on imposing temporary ban on the import of powdered milk? The local companies should be more aggressive to procure milk from local milk producers, he said. Mr. Saleh also mentioned that vegetable production is also hampered due to lack of transport and low prices. He suggested for short-term support through low interest loan for the small holder producers. He expressed his commitment that BRAC is always available to support the farmers and the government in all aspect.

Mr. Omer Zafar, Country Director for Bangladesh and the Maldives of IFAD, said that IFAD is bilaterally working with MOA, LGED, PKSf, World Bank, microcredit regulatory authority, PKSf to support the micro finance activity and they are engaged in crop production, fisheries, livestock under different projects. IFAD also support data collection and analysis, transport and logistic support for supply of inputs and facilitating the crop harvest to address the COVID-19 impacts through the partners, he mentioned. He also advised to find out the possibilities to collect funds from the ongoing projects for combating with the challenge of COVID-19. He said, IFAD is positive to extend support following the request from the government side.

Mr. Mohammad Yousuf, Director General (Additional Secretary), Department of Agricultural Marketing mentioned that at present 45 districts are under lockdown due to COVID-19. MoA issued a directive to allow the transportation of agricultural commodities for keeping the supply chain alive. Department of Agricultural Marketing is monitoring the process and collecting necessary data on various agricultural products, he mentioned.

Mr. Raquibul Amin, Country Representative, IUCN Bangladesh, said the people of the remote areas in Chattogram Hill Tracts are undergoing a food crisis and consuming their seeds. This could create a long-term impact of next season crop production and food security. We should think

about the production and consumption of nontraditional crops in the hills to face the upcoming challenge.

Ms. Ishrat Jahan, Regional Director, IFDC, Asia said that IFDC has a list of 2,000 farmers with cell phone numbers and they can collect information and provided awareness creating messages regarding COVID-19 situation to the listed farmers. She request FAO to include information in their assessment from progressive areas, moderately progressive areas and remote areas. Particularly the situation is worse in Rangpur, Barguna and Bhola where government support is limited, she mentioned.

Dr. Shaikh Mohammad Bokhtiar, Executive Chairman, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council mentioned that MoA has taken initiatives and supported farmers to harvest the Boro paddy in Haor areas. As of today 60% paddy successfully harvested, he said. He suggested to promote agricultural mechanization and identified the need for technical advice on appropriate harvesting equipment. CGIAR could provide additional information and examples from other countries for intensifying land use in Bangladesh, he mentioned. Mr. Bokhtiar advised to promote homestead and backyard farming engaging women to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the rural areas.

Dr. Rashid Syeda Zinia from Switzerland Embassy mentioned that there are char areas in the North Western part of Bangladesh and they are contributing reasonably to crop production and livestock. Involvement of private sectors is encouraging to increase the production productivity, she mentioned. She informed that they are receiving short-term financial proposals from different organization to provide quick support to minimize the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Md. Selim Uddin, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industries, mentioned that they are developing agro-food processing policies which will promote the formation of agro food processing platform. Expansion of agro-food processing industries will be able contribute in post COVID-19 situation.

Dr. Md. Abdul Mueeed, Director General, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said that the field level work is going on for harvesting Boro paddy. Dr. Mueeed mentioned that health issue of the farmers is crucial here and requested the development partners to provide necessary logistic support for the field level workers and farmers to ensure their health safety during field works. Quality seed import and fertilizer supply should be ensured for the next cropping season to get desired production of different crops, he mentioned. He emphasized the urgent need of short, medium and long-term strategy to combat with the COVID-19 induced situation. DAE emphasized on homestead garden vegetables production and is going to submit a project proposal of homestead farming to ensure the productive utilization of the under used area of homestead, he mentioned.

Mr. Christian Berger from World Bank mentioned that the World Bank is providing big project support to the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and activities under those project will play important role to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. He mentioned three broad sectors for interventions; food security, livelihood improvement and one-health initiative.

We need to develop short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies to face COVID-19 challenges. World Bank will mobilize funds under specific programmes and projects.

Ms. Lalita Bhattacharjee, Senior Nutrition Advisor, Meeting the Under Nutrition Challenge (MUCH) Project of FAO, mentioned that healthy and nutrient-dense food should be included in the food basket of COVID-19 affected people. We shall have to initiate awareness raising programmes for taking nutritious vegetables in the daily diet, she mentioned. Milk powder should not be given for the children under five, she suggested.

Mr. Shahin Yaqub, Consultant, Meeting the Under Nutrition Challenge (MUCH) Project of FAO, said that considering the Ramadan the food basket should be enriched with meat, milk and eggs. Under the perspective of COVID-19 the social protection network of government should be extended, he thought. He suggested to strengthen awareness raising program on nutrition and food safety issues on behalf of government, DPs and other actors.

Mr. Rezaul Karim, World Food Programme said that social safety net for poor farmers should be increased through inclusion of new-poor group resulted from the COVID-19 effect. There is lack of coordination between Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MODMR) and Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in case of implementation of the programs under social protection and it needs to minimize, he suggested.

Agenda 7: Closing remarks

At the end of the open discussion sessions the **Chair and co-chair of the meeting** summarized the session. They highlighted the issues of rapid impact assessment, short term, medium term and long-term plan of actions, coordination among all the stakeholders, maintaining the supply chain of agricultural commodities and inputs, using the underutilized land and promoting the homestead farming, agricultural mechanization, credit support to the farmers, strengthening the programs and project for livestock and fisheries, coordinated initiatives for harvesting the present crops and solid planning for the next crops seasons. Both of them agreed that the government, development partners and non-government organizations will have to work in a collaborative way to face the challenge of COVID-19 and made the following decisions:

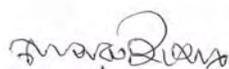
Decisions:

Sl no	Decision	Responsible agencies
1.	Rapid assessment on the impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture sector	FAO, CGIAR in collaboration with DPs
2.	Development of short term, medium term and long term plan of actions to combat COVID-19 induced problems and challenges for the agriculture sector	FAO, CGIAR, DPs and MOA

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3.	Strengthening coordination of the programmes under Ministry of Food, Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Local Government Division and other relevant ministries concerned to the broader spectrum of agriculture, food security and nutrition	FAO, CGIAR, DPs, and MOA, M/F, M/FL
4.	Promotion of homestead-based horticultural crop production and backyard farming initiatives to ensure family needs of nutrition	MOA, FAO, NGO and DPs
5.	Promoting COVID-19 related awareness building programmes for the farmers, all value chain and supply chain actors under agriculture sector	MOA, CGIAR, FAO and DPs
6.	Initiative for maintaining the supply chain of agricultural products, machineries' and inputs for maintaining next season crop production	MOA, FAO, CGIAR, DPs
7.	Support to establish a 'Model Safe Vegetables Market' in Dhaka and to link farmers with this market	FAO, MOA, DAM, BADC
8.	Formation of Working Groups on different areas namely Logistics & value chain improvement, agricultural inputs for production, Impact Assessment, Market Monitoring and stimulating demand, etc.	MOA, CGIAR, and FAO

The meeting ended with vote of thanks from the Chair and Co-Chair:



Md Nasiruzzaman
Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture
and Chair, LCG-AFSRD



Robert D. Simpson
FAO Representative in Bangladesh,
and Co-Chair, LCG-AFSRD

Participant List of 10th Meeting on LCG –AFSRD
Held on 28/4/2020through Zoom

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