

Mid-Term Review of FoSHoL-CARE Project



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Executive Summary

Introduction and Objectives

Food availability in a society alone does not necessarily ensure food security for all socio-economic strata. Food security for individual groups of people (strata) is a complex function of three broad categories of variables: (i) availability, (ii) access, and (iii) utilization. Therefore, making technical solutions (e.g., balance doses of fertilizers, seed production and preservation techniques) available at the doorsteps of food deficit farm households does help increase agricultural production. *However, in order to attain sustainable and long-lasting food security for the resource poor agriculture-dependent food insecure households, it is needed to empower them so that (i) they can influence decision-making processes that can have important bearing on their lives and livelihoods, (ii) have functional linkages with agricultural extension services and sources of new agricultural innovations, and (iii) effectively address institutional (e.g., exploitative terms and condition under which sharecroppers cultivate) and social constraints (exclusion and discrimination experienced by the indigenous communities) that restrict them to achieve food and livelihood security.*

The CARE Bangladesh shares a long-term vision of sustainable development with the global development community. Food Security for Sustainable Household Livelihoods (FoSHoL) project is one of CARE's initiatives to contribute to improvements in the livelihoods by increasing the availability, access, and utilization of food by targeted households at High Barind Tract areas covering parts of the 3 districts of Chapai Nawabganj, Rajshahi, and Naogaon. This four-year project aims at achieving four results: (i) increase capacities of targeted households for adopting innovative agricultural activities (**Result 1**); (ii) train resource farmers for facilitating agriculture innovation in their communities (**Result 2**); (iii) enhance capacities of community groups to work together to address constraints and opportunities affecting food security (**Result 3**); and (iv) increase capacities of local actors (Partner NGO, PNGOs) to replicate and sustain project activities (**Result 4**).

The **objectives** of the mid-term review are to: (a) assess the progress so far made in relation to achieving the above results, and (b) put forward recommendations for improving effectiveness (in terms of achieving the results) of the project for the rest of the life of the project.

Methodology and Implementation

A team of consultants consisting socio-economic specialist, agriculturist, gender specialist, and community food security specialist conducted the review. After reviewing available project documents – the MTR team made field visits, conducted interviews and group discussion meetings during July 31 – October 27, 2007. A work plan was developed by the team and approved by the FoSHoL management. The team carried out intensive visits to all three districts of Barind. The MTR methodology included the following: review of existing project documents, consultations with key CARE staff and the service providing institutions, documents review, interviews with key staff in partner NGOs, field visits to pilot intervention and PNGO implementing areas, and focus group discussions with community farmers and resource farmers. The data/information collection strategies included Key Informant

Interview (KII), Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The study team interacted with 21 community groups of seven randomly selected upazilas, under Chapai Nawabganj, Naogaon and Rajshahi districts where the first cycle and second cycle participants formed 600 groups. The review team worked closely with senior management of the project, governance coordinator, and assistant country director of CARE Bangladesh. In addition, the team interviewed the representatives of European Commission (EU) and International Rice Research Institution (IRRI). All qualitative information were scrutinized and analyzed. Data/information from various sources have been triangulated in the analysis.

Findings

- (01) The core philosophy behind FoSHoL is to facilitate self-employment through enhancing bondages between agriculture dependent poor and marginal poor food-insecured rural households, and agricultural activities (in a broader sense) for raising food production as a whole and increasing food availability, accessibility and utilization in particular for attaining better livelihood.
- (02) The **FoSHoL ‘message’** is Empowering the resource poor households living at the verge of disruption from agricultural activities in attaining sustainable food security and improved livelihood through capacity building in terms of: (i) knowledge on and practices of improved methods of agriculture, rights and entitlements, and social capital formation (i.e., sustainable empowerment of the poor and marginalized including sharecroppers, women headed households and indigenous peoples); (ii) upgrading the knowledge and skills on agricultural technologies of selected advanced and enthusiastic representatives participant farmers- *resource farmers* for acting as grass root level extension agents after end of the project (EoP); (iii) facilitating long lasting and effective unity of poor people through developing micro level resource-poor peoples’ organizations (groups) for improving livelihood; (iv) facilitating self-managed savings/resource generation, fund utilization and its efficient management; and (v) integrating the community farmer groups with the government structure as well with relevant private agents through creation and strengthening of the linkages to ensure sustainability.
- (03) The MTR team has identified that in order to provide systematic support towards household food security, the FoSHoL/CARE has undertaken interlinked **four strategies**: (i) group formation, (ii) training, (iii) partnership: network, linkage, and (iv) income generation activities (IGA).
- (04) The design of FoSHoL project and its implementation strategies are in line with sustainable attainment of food security of the targeted small and marginal resource poor farmers including sharecroppers, women headed households and indigenous peoples. The four results that are formulated for achieving the purpose level indicators are in line with the project objectives.
- (05) The result wise planned activities and the current level of quantitative achievements in general is **satisfactory, except in a few** particular sub-activities. Example: For result 1, there are three sub-activities out of a total of 26, which may be termed low achieved (65% and below). For result 2, only one out of 16 sub-activities has been found as low performing. For result 3, five out of 23 sub-activities have achieved less than 65%

achievement. These are (i) conducting elections at village (1.5%), (ii) social awareness session on divorce (4%), (ii) social awareness session on dowry (50%), (iii) social awareness session on polygamy (17%), (iv) social awareness session on sharecroppers law (45%), (v) social awareness session on early marriage (50%). For result 4, only one out of 17 sub-activities is low performing: exposure visit to India (50%). It implies that for FoSHoL, the result 3 related activities need special attention (especially on rights, entitlement and women empowerment related sub-activities).

Result 1:

- (06) The activities related to knowledge dissemination on agricultural technologies among the community farmers are much ahead compared to practice. On the whole, the farmers have learned around 15 technological issues, while on average, they practice around 4 technologies. The linkage development between related key GOB departments and community farmer groups needs to go a long way before it turns into an effective shape. A large proportion of community farmers have not been covered under any training program. On average only about 2% of group members have received some training on cultivation technologies. Considering low literacy level of the community members many of the technological issues disseminated to the farmers are difficult for them to internalise, and lower rate of practice is the outcome. Periodic refresher-discussion of the topics may help better internalisation of the innovative technologies. According to community farmers, opportunity to learn scientific aspects of farming, ameliorating the traditional misconceptions about agro-technology, learning from each other within the group, group unity, and mutual help are strengths of the project. Whereas, short duration of farmers involvement with the project (30 month cycle), lower level of linkage with service provider, lot of issues necessary for attaining higher efficiency in farming (that are not discussed in learning sessions)– are some of the major weaknesses.

Result 2:

- (07) Although the resource farmers (RFs) are expected to work as community level extension agents, they are primarily focused on some selected technologies (instead of a comprehensive package of technology), which will be the sources of income earning for them. The RFs are confident of their capability to disseminate modern technologies, which they have learned in training/orientation sessions. These technologies primarily include (i) rice seed production, preservation, (ii) poultry vaccination, (iii) vegetable seedling development, (iv) nursery development, (v) livestock management, (vi) line transplantation and use of LCC, (vii) poultry rearing, and (viii) homestead vegetable production (bed method and pit method). The duration of each of these trainings are 3-5 days, which, according to MTR team, is short. Moreover, such trainings would have been much effective if those would follow the learning by doing approach.
- (08) The project has taken different initiatives for the RFs to orient and establish linkage with different service providers. Joint workshop at Upazila level has been organized involving RFs and all relevant service providers such as DAE, DoL, DoF, BADC, Youth development, Seed dealer, Social welfare, Cooperative and other concerned agencies. The process, which has been initiated to establish the linkages between the RFs and the service providers through the workshop, is in the right direction. But due to its discontinuity and lack of follow up by the project officials, it did not bring expected results in establishing linkages between the service providers and RFs. Increase in

leadership quality of the RFs, increase in knowledge and skill of the RFs, propagation and practice of modern technology use, access to service providers, involvement in income generation activities, and availability of source of information in the community may be considered as strengths of result 2. While, inadequate training of the RFs, weak linkage with service providers, lack of opportunity for learning by doing, RFs are trained only on few technologies are some of the weaknesses of FoSHoL.

Result 3:

- (09) The project has meticulously formed the community groups following household approach. Each group is formed with around 25 resource poor households who primarily depend on agricultural activities for livelihood. Both spouses are the group members, and for female headed households, there are instances that male child along with the mother becomes the group members. Thus, the groups through out the project area are gender balanced and altogether encompasses about 30 thousand people as members. A committee comprising of a chair, secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer and some members manages the group. Either one of the chair or secretary, and assistant treasurer is female, where as in a number of instances the treasurer also is a female. The group management has received training and/or orientation on (i) SWOT analysis, (ii) resource mapping, (iii) needs assessment and planning, (iv) savings and credit operation, (v) bank account operation, and (vi) financial process documentation. Most of the groups have prepared their respective annual activity plan after assessing and analysing their problems and opportunities through resource mapping. Groups also analysed the well being conditions of the households. The groups under the facilitative support from the project staff (mainly GDF) have developed their constitutions. Most of the farmers groups are able to design activities against the identified and selected problems. They are able to make yearly action plan towards mitigating local and social problems. There are instances, where some participant group members have successfully geared up the process of preparing deed of agreement on sharecropping with the landowners. However, it has been reported that success stories on the same is not widely shared and replicated.
- (10) Result 3 has much strength, namely Formation and functioning of groups, maintaining of the required documentation (including financial/ savings-credit operation), capability of identifying social issues such as dowry, early marriage, divorce, polygamy, sanitation, and IGA planning. The success areas include the following: conduction of annual general meeting, election of management committee in most groups of first cycle and some in second cycle. Moreover, most of the groups have started IGA activities, which is also a success under result 3. Furthermore, procuring sanitary latrines from service providing institutions have found in progress as per their action plans. However, it is yet to be clear that how many of these groups will be in a position to sustain as organizational entity after phasing out. The optimistic estimates, which have been shared by the PNGO and embedded FoSHoL staff indicates that only about 30% of the groups will sustain.
- (11) The Community groups knowledge about the rights and entitlement of the poor, in most instances, is not much satisfactory, so as their effort to increase social capital and resource mobilization. In many groups, social awareness raising sessions on key right issues have not yet been held. These issues include dowry, early marriage, divorce, polygamy, sharecroppers law, etc. These are the areas where the project needs to pay more attention.

Result 4:

- (12) The project has undertaken various measures to enhance capacities of the PNGOs. Most of the targets set under the result have been quantitatively achieved. Overall capacities of the PNGO staff and management have increased. Participatory decision-making process among the NGO staff have been geared up and responsiveness of PNGOs (staff and management) to small scale farmer needs has increased to satisfactory level. The PNGOs along with FoSHoL have been able to gain the trust among the community and service providing departments. However, project need to pay more emphasis on the following areas: (i) work with groups on their organizational sustainability, (ii) mobilize complementary funding, (iii) cautious attention during technology dissemination, and (iv) practical orientation of FTs on agricultural technology.

Impact:

- (13) FoSHoL project has generated the following benefits for community groups/farmers: (i) developing their agricultural activities towards modern technology, increased production, and income status (IGAs) through learning sessions, technical supports and savings/credit facilitation, (ii) increasing leadership capacity, (iii) building linkages with service providers, (iv) achieving social acceptance, (v) increasing awareness on social issues, and (vi) not taking the high-interest loan from *mahajans*.
- (14) On the whole, the project at the midcourse has been instrumental in attaining some noticeable changes on the livelihood of the beneficiaries. These are: (i) number of lean days for most of the households have reduced, (ii) some diversity in terms of food compositions attained, (iii) yield of crops including vegetable and poultry increased, and (iv) some increase in income from farm and non-farm sources have taken place. These changes vary from group to group due to various reasons, which needs comprehensive study.

Recommendations

The MTR team forwards the following key recommendations for consideration by FoSHoL/CARE:

Recommendation	Justification
It is recommended to extend the project for at least another couple of years for continuing some project activities, especially those which aims at supporting groups to evolve into sustainable community-based organizations.	Facilitate the participants' capacities to consolidate and enrich learning on improved and appropriate farm technologies and practices, strengthening group cohesion, further developing group's conflict resolution skills and developing alternative group leaderships, strengthening linkages between participant groups and public-private sector service providers, and further building social capital of participant groups so that they can withstand any external threats to their survival.
More and more inclusion of the community farmer group members in the local level committees should be stressed.	The 30 months duration of the project cycle is not feasible for establishing a sustainable linkage with the Government and the non-governmental institutions and particularly for

Recommendation	Justification
Communication between staff dealing with technical issues (FTs) and developmental issues (GDFs) should be rationalized, and the interaction between the staff should be institutionalised more.	establishing linkage at individual level. Field Trainers, and Group Development Facilitators are not equally communicated with some information, and in some instances the interaction between them is not adequate.
MoU should be signed between the project (as representative of 600 groups) and the respective departments; and upazila support committees should be constituted at all FoSHoL upazilas where representatives of farmers groups will also be included.	Absence of MoU may interrupt the existing level of cooperation, especially with the transfer of some of the key officials of the respective departments and/or with the phasing-out of the project.
Agriculture technology trainings should be more practice-oriented for the FTs.	Training can be designed in a form of 'production methodology' which may follow a life cycle of a production process.
Extensive disease/pest management training is required for FTs urgently, which may cover topics from 'Life No Pest Project' (Phase II). Extensive training on vegetables cultivation and livestock is required.	There is a high demand among the farmers about disease and pest control.
Computer literacy training, training on report writing along with training on agricultural technologies is suggested for GDF.	Extensive computer literacy, and training on report writing would be helpful for personal and organizational development. Higher orientation on agricultural technologies will help GDF in fieldwork to supplement the FTs.
RFs should be well-equipped with a wider package of technologies instead of some selected technologies. More refreshers training on different technologies for the RFs should be designed and imparted.	The needs for technologies from community farmers are diverse.
The trainings for CFs and RFs will be more effective if the duration is increased and learning by doing approach is followed.	The duration of training is short and the topics of trainings are demand-driven (as reported by most trainees and trainers).
Follow-up and monitoring are required for establishing and maintaining linkages between service providers and farmers (especially RFs) – at both upazilla and local levels.	Process of establishing linkages between RFs and the service providers through workshop was in the right direction but it experienced discontinuity. Moreover, lack of follow up by project officials did not yield expected results.
Refreshers training, demonstration and cross visits are recommended to be organized for CFs and RFs on a regular basis.	Sustainability of knowledge and skills gained from the training requires continuous refreshers training; demonstration and cross visits to successful areas of implementation.
A feasibility study on IGA needs to be conducted by the project.	Households' livelihood is closely related to economic security.

Recommendation	Justification
Special trainings on IGA selection, IGA planning, implementation, accounting, marketing and monitoring need to be provided to community farmers, and especially to women farmers.	These are the knowledge fronts on which community farmers were found weak but which are absolutely necessary to ensure sustainability of the project efforts.
It is suggested that more efforts are made to include community farmers in the various local level institutions, which, in turn, will lead to availability of certain amount of social capital to households and thereby enhance livelihood security.	In Bangladesh, the village society is organized around traditional and informal social groups like local <i>samitys</i> , mosque committees, and other informal associations. The more formal groups include the <i>union parishads</i> , school managing committees, NGOs, and CBOs.
Participation of vulnerable households (female-headed, indigenous people and sharecropper) in community activities (for higher social capital formation) needs to be increased.	In the pilot/innovation area, the female-headed, indigenous people and sharecropping households are actively participating in various community activities. In other areas, these groups are mostly isolated and not adequately participating in the community activities.
FoSHoL/CARE may try to work out ways and means to integrate and establish new marketing links between farmers and agribusinesses/large retailers through group marketing.	Lack of farmers' access to information on pricing, market, credit, inefficient transport, and other relevant issues hinder rural farmers' efforts to become competitive in the national marketplace.
Training on agricultural product marketing is necessary.	
Special attention may be devoted towards effective integration of women farmers and small farm holders into commercialized homestead gardening schemes through improvement of domestic farmers market, roadside stand, community farmers market.	
It is strongly suggested to replicate the best practices attained by the pilot component in other areas where PNGOs are implementing the project.	
FoSHoL/CARE can arrange workshops for the higher management of the PNGOs to motivate them and enhance their capacity in fund seeking/raising ability.	Mobilization of complementary funding by PNGOs is a key for attaining sustainability.
In training sessions for the PNGO staff, resource persons may prepare and circulate handouts on each topic, which will not only be very useful for the participants, but also will help the resource persons to be well-prepared for conducting the sessions subsequently.	More time usefully spent by the resource persons in the trainings would make the sessions more effective.

Recommendation	Justification
Maximum use of pictorial material is needed especially for the technical side. Practical experience should be a major part of the training schedule.	
A PM should be informed of any prospective training at least one week ahead of the schedule.	On many occasions, arranging trainings on short notices have been difficult for the PMs.
Recruitment of one APM for each of the PMs may optimally reduce the PM's workload.	It is difficult for one single PM to oversee two <i>upazilas</i> at a time.
FTs and GDFs can work more effectively if motorcycles are provided, instead of bicycle.	Easy mode of transport will make FTs and GDFs work convenient and gear-up the project activities like in the piloting area.
The embedded FOs can set targets with PNGOs or can share his/her action plan.	This is required to overcome confusion among the PNGO staff, and to strengthen participatory approach and ensure transparency.
If budget allocation to PNGO is not possible, FOs can take responsibilities to take decisions to allocate budget on a certain level of expenditure.	This may expedite the pace of work of the PNGOs. PNGOs supervision over FTs and GDFs should be strengthened (supervisors can be recruited). This will help FOs to work more effectively.
The PNGOs should be well equipped to enable the groups toward attaining their <i>sustainability</i> .	Majority of the groups are not organized in a way that could lead them towards sustainability.