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CASE COMPETITION

Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) have long been a part of USAID's work. USAID staff and implementing partners have always sought ways to better understand the development process and USAID's contribution to it, to collaborate in order to speed and deepen results, to share the successes and lessons of USAID's initiatives, and to institute improvements to programs and operations. Through this case competition, USAID and its LEARN mechanism seek to capture and share the stories of those efforts. To learn more about the CLA Case Competition, visit the USAID Learning Lab at usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition.

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting to Develop the Bangladesh Dairy Sector

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What is the general context in which the story takes place?

With 145 large ruminants per square kilometer, Bangladesh has one of the highest cattle densities in the world, particularly notable when compared with such countries as India (90), Ethiopia (30) and Brazil (20).¹ In spite of this, the productivity of the local breed, particularly in the country's southwestern region is about 2–3 liters of milk per cow per day, compared with 10 liters in neighboring countries such as China and India. Meanwhile, the productivity of crossbreeds is 8–10 liters, compared to 15–20 liters in these other countries. All donor-funded livestock projects in Bangladesh have been implemented in the northern region, where climatic conditions and enabling factors favor the rearing of cattle. In 2013, however, two new livestock projects began implementation in the southwest region, which is Feed the Future Zone of Influence (a region afflicted with poverty and with increasing soil and water salinization that hamper agricultural productivity). With the award of the Feed the Future Bangladesh Livestock Production for Improved Nutrition program, the country now has seven livestock projects funded by seven donor agencies, with three in the Feed the Future Zone of Influence and the others in the northern region.

In 2014, these seven projects formed the Bangladesh Livestock Coordination Group in order to have a synergistic effect on the development of the Bangladesh livestock sector.

What was the main challenge/opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?

The focus of donor-funded livestock projects has always been in the northern region, because of the favorable climate and an enabling environment that made it possible to rear livestock there. However, the southwestern region (the Feed the Future Zone), which has a fifth of the cattle population, had been neglected for several decades due to the increasing soil and water salinization from tidal surges and annual flooding that hamper agricultural productivity. As a result, while international donors' livestock funding has focused on the northern region, there has been none in the south. Each of the four livestock projects in the northern region, funded by four

¹ Bangladesh National Livestock Development Policy, 2007, p.36.



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different donor agencies, focused on achieving individually defined program objectives, with no plan to link with the other projects in the region because of the perception that they were in competing for more funding from international donors. Therefore, there were no thoughts of a coordinated and collaborative approach to livestock development that would benefit the entire northern region or the country as a whole.

Subsequently, the livestock situation in the Feed the Future Zone was neglected to the extent that it lagged significantly behind the northern region. With each of the four projects implementing similar interventions through different processes, the form of beneficiary capacity building or improved technologies that were being promoted depended on which project was doing the implementation. For example, to determine the quality of milk at collection centers, one project is promoting the use of lactometer, which measures milk density, while another project is promoting a digital fat testing machine that measure fat content. In another example, one project promotes nutrition education based on increased dairy consumption from household production, while another is focused on the dairy value chain, with no interest in nutrition. This would mean that beneficiaries of the project promoting nutrition could have a better nutrition status than those of the project focused on the value chain.

The Bangladesh Livestock Coordination Group recognized a need to improve the productivity of the more than 35 million cattle in the Feed the Future Zone (about one-fifth of the country's cattle population). The group also recognized the need to harmonize beneficiary capacity building activities of across projects, as well as the improved technologies that different projects have promoted, in order to have a coordinated and synergistic effect. Finally, the group saw an opportunity to create a sustainable approach that could facilitate private sector actors (such as dairy processing companies, feed companies and drug companies) to implement project activities in a way that will ensure that these actors could continue implementation long after donor funding ceased and projects closed.

Describe the CLA approach or activity employed.

Currently, seven livestock projects in Bangladesh are funded by seven international donors: USAID, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UKAid, Heifer International, the Government of the Netherlands, and the Government of Sweden. Each project operates in different districts of the country, with some overlaps. USAID recognized the need to bring the projects together to harmonize their different implementation approaches into one effective approach that would ensure standardized capacity building for all beneficiaries and adoption of similar improved technologies. After two months of consultation, USAID brought all seven projects to commit their time and technical expertise in forming the Bangladesh Livestock Coordination Group in February 2014. Since its formation, this group has been meeting quarterly to explore ways to synergize and align their efforts in the northern and southern regions toward developing the Bangladesh livestock sector.

One of the group's key approaches is to focus on interventions common to all the projects, which could be implemented together, through coordination and collaboration. For example, if master trainers need training, they could bring in seven different consultants for each project — or they could combine resources to bring in two or three consultants to train master trainers from all the projects, thereby saving on remuneration, travels, accommodation, per diem, and other costs. In another example, if the use of digital fat-testing machine enables farmers to earn more income based on the fat content of their milk, thereby motivating the farmers to adopt improved management practices to increase household income, all of the projects could explore this economy of scale through bulk purchase of the machine or by planning joint farm demonstrations to motivate beneficiaries to adopt improved management practices that could increase milk-fat content (and, subsequently, household income).

With a group such as this, there is a huge opportunity to leverage resources with the private dairy sector (processors, feed companies, and drug companies) so that they are effectively engaged in the implementation of project activities for sustainability. For example, rather than project employees training beneficiaries directly, they should be training the employees of these private sector actors, who should then train the beneficiaries who supply milk to them, because when donor funding ceases, it is these employees who will continue to provide training — as long as the companies see the benefits of increased milk productivity, increased sales, and



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increased income. Accordingly, several Livestock Coordination Group meetings have been held with the private dairy sector to promote and agree on these approaches. The next step is the actual implementation of the agreements.

Meanwhile, decades of neglect have left the southern region lagging behind the northern region. As the saying goes, a picture is worth more a thousand words. Therefore, collaborative livestock fairs or farm visits (under strict biosecurity guidelines) between farmers in both regions, organized by all projects, will go a long way toward motivating farmers from both regions. Northern farmers, seeing the consequences of non-adoption of improved management practices or technologies, will be motivated never to lag behind. Southern farmers, seeing the unlimited opportunities of adopting improved management practices or technologies, will be motivated to adopt as many practices or technologies as practically or financially possible.

Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources or enabling factors)?

The major challenge is that some implementing partners perceive the others as competitors that must be outperformed. As a result, they tend to hoard technical information or knowledge in order to have a competitive advantage in times of solicitation for project funds. It was, and is still, a challenge to convince these partners that the development of the Bangladesh livestock sector should be of paramount interest, not securing more funds for project activities, and that sharing information and technology brings more advantages than disadvantages, by enabling validation when implemented by different parties. For example, one partner reports that a local breed of one of his beneficiaries is producing 9 liters of milk per day, compared with the average of 2–3 liters per day, but the other partners dispute this claim, as they do not believe that a pure local breed can produce that much milk, even with improved practices and technology. If the first project is kind enough to share with the others, and similar results are obtained, this validates the first partner's his report.

Another challenge is that each project has different award agreements, which focus on the differing objectives of each donor. Our primary approach has been to focus on the common objectives. For example, one project's objective is an enhanced dairy value chain, while another is focused on increasing productivity for increased household consumption of dairy products. Therefore, the focus of the Livestock Coordination Group is promotion of increased dairy productivity, toward increased milk production as inputs for the dairy value chain *and* for household processing into dairy products for household consumption.

Each project also has a different annual budget, from \$1 million to \$4 million. Therefore, the financial capabilities to implement certain improved practices or technologies are limited. For instance, one project is able to promote the use of lactometer to measure milk quality, while another is able to promote the use of digital fat testing machine. In such situations, the coordination group wants to determine whether there are overlapping areas of operation so that it could look at the feasibility of organizing a central milk collection center for both projects, where the milk collector will have a digital fat testing machine that could be used for farmers from both projects.

A major success has been the four training sessions, led by international experts and funded by four of the projects, to jointly train master trainers from all of the projects. For each session, members were required to send five of their master trainers. Although the USAID/Bangladesh Farmer-to-Farmer Program facilitated this process, each hosting project funded the training venue, as well as consultant transportation, lodging, and meals.

What have been the outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?

Eighty master trainers from the projects have been trained so far, 40 from each region. Another 50 will be trained by December 31, 2015. Each training session is on different improved management practices. By February 2016, the goal is to determine how many other trainers from each project have been trained by these master trainers, and how many dairy farmers have benefited.



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By February 2016, the coordination group has plans for one farmer field exchange visit between the north and the south, as well as two livestock fairs, one in the south and another in the north. We look forward to determining how many of the seven projects are able to participate and how many of their farmers are able to attend.

There have also been at least two inter-project visits, which were unheard of before the formation of the Livestock Coordination Group. The visits have led to discussions on how projects can glean best practices from each other, and the creation of a learning platform to exchange ideas and experiences. The group will continue to encourage such visits as a means of removing the perception of rivalry among implementing partners and encouraging greater coordination and collaboration.

Finally, the group has had discussions with three dairy processors that control 80 percent of the Bangladesh dairy market (Milk Vita, BRAC Dairy, and Akij Dairy) about our private sector project implementation approach, and they have expressed a willingness to work with us. In the coming weeks, the group plans to implement this agreement.

As a result of the Livestock Coordination Group, more farmers from the southern region are receiving more standardized training than ever before, and more improved technologies such as hay balers and saltlick tools are being introduced.

What were the most important lessons learned?

As it is widely known, there is strength in numbers. For this group of projects, the strength comes from such things as increased ability to leverage resources and negotiate with parties that have different interests. Projects with similar objections or thematic areas should always explore ways of coordinating and collaborating with each other. Where members have different objectives, the focus should be on areas of similarity, or similar approaches to implementing different objectives. One should always avoid a situation where one project — deliberately or unintentionally — imposes its values on the others. Rather, these values should be discussed, and then accepted or rejected. The strengths of larger projects may be leveraged, but they must not be allowed to become “bullies.” All decisions to be implemented by the group must be supported by all the projects, so that dissenters do not feel that their opinions are not relevant. In other words, all member projects should be heard and not drowned out by those who can better articulate their points of view.

It is difficult to have projects whose chiefs of party feel they have all the answers but whose projects are funded by different donor agencies, for which there is no one single control. Extreme tact must be displayed at all times to ensure that no one is offended or intimidated.