

Upazila BMO – Samity network A winning model

Intervention Brief: ILGS



Background

One of the focus areas for Katalyst is improving competitiveness of rural farmers. This can be achieved by creating a sustainable and conducive environment for the farmers to ensure their access to improved Upazila level government extension services.

Government extension departments are the largest service providers for rural farmers in Bangladesh. However, many farmers lack access to the information and services provided by these departments which seriously hinder their growth, productivity and income.



Katalyst has developed a model under which Upazila Business Membership Organization (Upazila BMO or simply UZBMO) - Upazila level cross-sectoral traders' association (private sector) links rural farmers' samity (groups) with the Upazila government offices (public sector) for necessary services and information. Cross-cutting trading opportunity between Upazila based traders and rural farmers is the driving force for this sustainable relationship.

Upazila BMO-Samity channels have established themselves as complementary mechanism for Upazila government extension departments to increase their 'last mile' farmer outreach more efficiently. The interactions between UZBMOs and government extension offices have helped to create an environment to resolve local issues by mutual participation between the private and the public sector.

Target beneficiaries

Rural farmers belonging to agriculture, fisheries and livestock sectors.

Location

The team will visit Gurudashpur Upazila under Natore district to see how the farmers under the Upazila BMO-Samity network are getting improved access to agricultural services. The team will meet with the Upazila BMO leaders and also visit one farmer Samity.

Major activities

Among two main strategies set by Katalyst for this intervention, the first strategy focuses on promoting the concept of UZBMO to the Upazila based cross sectoral associations as well as providing technical support to the UZBMOs on organizational development and advocacy skills. The strategy strengthens the demand side by mobilizing the farmers and traders under one common umbrella.

The second strategy focuses on improving Upazila level extension service delivery by facilitating formation of Public Private Initiatives (PPIs). Major activities carried out so far are promoting the concepts of Upazila based Sectoral PPIs and providing training to potential Upazila government officials, representatives from traders and farmers on how to form and run effective PPIs.

Synergy

For the purpose of applying the UZBMO-Samity channel for Katalyst sectors, these UZBMO-Samity channels act as a service to Katalyst sector teams which they use as additional, complementary channel for disseminating different information packages to a wider outreach of farmers.

Achievements

- Till now over 73,000 farmers (48,000 in wider economy) in 74 Upazilas use Upazila BMO-Samity networks and Public Private Initiatives (PPIs) for raising their voice and increasing their access to multifarious agricultural services.
- Upazila BMOs and Agriculture and Livestock departments of 14 Upazilas have formed 17 Upazila level sectoral Public Private Initiatives with representatives from Upazila based traders, rural farmers and Upazila extension offices of the concerned sectors.
- Government extension offices are taking the opportunity of using UZBMO-Samity networks to reach more farmers and circulate extension related information.
- The private sector companies are also using the networks to increase their outreach of farmers for promoting their products as well as providing agro related services.

Few highlights of UZBMO-Samity networks:

- Upazila BMOs are organizing and sponsoring training programs and awareness campaigns for the farmers which have helped the government extension offices to impart proper farming technologies to a wider outreach of farmers, beyond the annual calendar target for government trainings.
- Upazila PPIs in different Upazilas have organized training for farmers on different issues - quality seed production, compost fertilizer usage and production, bio-security in poultry farms. Upazila government officials acted as resource persons in these trainings. Different private sector companies have provided support for these trainings.
- Farmers received improved yield after attending and adopting newly learned practices from these trainings.
- Different Private sector companies are using Upazila BMO-Samity networks for delivering information on multifarious agro related issues, such as, fisheries, poultry management, irrigation, etc.

Way forward

Ensuring government and private sector buy-in of the concept and their support to spread the program into other areas of Bangladesh is critical for the scale up of the program. The government has formed a task force comprising 2 representatives each from 3 extension departments (Department of Agricultural Extension, Department of Fisheries and Department of Livestock) to assess the scopes of nationwide replication of the program and as part of the plan, there will be a government led pilot of the program in 20 new Upazilas. The task force will also be responsible to collaborate with Katalyst initiatives in the program Upazilas. Meanwhile, the private sector companies are using the UZBMO-Samity channels for promoting their products and disseminating agro information. They have also shown interest to assess the scopes of expanding the program on their own.

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