

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Sunday, 30 May 2021 10:00 GMT +06:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Fifth Sub-National Dialogue in Sunamganj
CONVENED BY	Khaja Abdul Hannan
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/25580/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Member State
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	Bangladesh

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

70

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

31-50

51-65

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

54 Male

16 Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

Agriculture/crops

Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

Agro-forestry

Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

Education

Communication

Food processing

Food retail, markets

Food industry

Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

Local Non-Governmental Organization

International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Dialogue was organized to solicit inputs and insights for the Food Systems Summit by gaining an understanding about the district, challenges its inhabitants regularly face as one of the hilly districts of the country, and how these are affecting the pathways to food system transformation and attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Dialogue brought together a diversity of stakeholders from Government Departments, Semi-autonomous and Autonomous Organisations, Private Sector Organisations, Business networks, Civil Society Organisations, and grassroots level representatives – working across the food system from production to consumption.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The dialogue reflected most aspects of the Principles which particularly includes Act with Urgency, Commit to the Summit, Be Respectful, Recognize Complexity and innovation to solution, Embrace Multi-stakeholder Inclusivity. In terms of Being Respectful, the four working groups (Availability of diversified, safe, and nutritious food; Transformation, delivery, access, and role of the private sector; Consumer behaviour, nutrition, and food safety; and Climate vulnerability, inclusion, and governance) facilitated during this Sub-National Dialogue focused on nutritious and safe food, with a broad lens ranging from production to consumption as well as examined vulnerabilities and challenges of inclusion. As a result, the linkages with other tracks were also discussed and covered during the working group facilitation. In Recognising Complexity and Embracing Multi-stakeholder Inclusivity, Government Departments, Semi-autonomous and Autonomous Organisations, Private Sector Organisations, Business networks, Civil Society Organisations, and Grass Root level Representatives highlighted the significance of working coordination as well as make people aware of what they consume and how the food can be safe. In addition, imperfect Supply chain, gradually decreasing agricultural land and at mass level, habit of fast-food intake, climate change effects were some other areas highlighted as some of the challenges in the way of ensuring safe food consumption. Participants emphasized the importance of mass level awareness range from duty bearers to consumers as the prime measure to reduce food unsafety. The dialogue address strengthening coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders to work collectively. It reflects issues specific to the region that may feed into the UNFSS, in a participatory manner. The virtual dialogue event was divided into 03 parts- inaugural (panel), group discussion and concluding session. The dialogue came up with some real-life challenges.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

The National Dialogue Committee of Bangladesh, recognizes the critical nature of organizing discussions involving multiple sectors and stakeholders, given the complexity of the food system. Additionally, it is necessary to establish a small working group comprised of diverse stakeholders, including the private sector and youth, in order to demonstrate the connections between the various action tracks. It will enable the facilitation of talks on a variety of food system-related challenges, rather than focusing exclusively on one action track. At the same time, it emphasizes the ideas of involvement for learning as well as the importance of a participatory approach in capturing the voice of a large majority. It is also important to ensure that regional nuances and challenges facing vulnerable groups are captured.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

Sunamganj is a representation of the wetland ecosystem in the north eastern part of Bangladesh, collectively called haor and spread across 80000 square kilometres. Haor, physically is a bowl or saucer shaped shallow depression, also known as a back-swamp. During monsoon haors receive surface runoff water from rivers and canals to become vast stretches of turbulent water. There are as many as 423 small or large Haors in Bangladesh.

The core Haor area, alternatively referred to as the Haor basin or the Sylhet basin, is estimated to spread over an area of 25,000 square kilometers. The Haor basin is a mosaic of wetland habitats including rivers, streams, irrigation canals, large areas of seasonally flooded cultivated plains, and hundreds of Haors and beels. This wetland area is crisscrossed by numerous rivers coming down from hills in India with a huge amount of runoff water that frequently cause flash flood and cause extensive flooding routinely during the monsoons. The topography of Haor regions is uneven. In terms of geographical elevation, they are lower than the normal plane lands. Virtually, all of this land is below 8 meters and is flooded for 7- 8 months to depths of 5 meters or more during the monsoon.

The total area of Sunamganj district is 3747.2 sq. km. of which 16.28 sq. km. are under forest. The district nestled in the haor region has young piedmonts plain, a gentle sloping landscape mainly consisting of loamy sediments subject to shallow flooding. In the central part, the soil contains bluish silty clay of the Surma, Kushiya old flood plain basin. The main rivers and rivulets flowing through the district are Surma, Kushiya, Jadukata, Kamarkhali, Kalni, Nokunda, Bowai, Nitai, Sonai, Gunai, Somesswari and Nawa. Most of them are tributaries of the two main rivers, Surma and Kushiya, which are non-tidal and navigable throughout the year by country boats. The flowing length of the rivers is about 195 kms (120 miles). The economy of Sunamganj is predominantly agricultural. Out of total 387,205 land holdings in the district, 53.39 % of holdings are farms that produce a variety of crops: local and HYV rice, wheat, vegetables, jute, spices, cash crops, pulses, oilseeds and others. Various fruits like, pineapple, banana, mango, guava, jackfruit, black berries, coconut, orange, and dates are grown. Pineapples and oranges especially, grow in abundance. Besides crops, livestock and fishery are other main sources of household income. Fish of different varieties are caught from rivers, tributary channels, creeks, and haors and even from paddy fields during the rainy season. Sunamganj is a major source of freshwater fish; Tanguar Haor is the largest inland billabong for aquaculture.

The total cultivated area in seven north-eastern Haor districts is about 1.26 million hectares of which 0.68 million hectares is under wetlands. Boro (rice)-Fallow-Fallow is the dominant cropping pattern in the entire Haor basin. Water remains either stagnant or in form of flash floods during the months of June to November and mainly Boro rice (winter rice cultivated from November to May under irrigation) is grown in the Rabi season (mid-November to April).

Flood, especially flash floods causes severe damage to Boro rice just before harvesting almost every year. In recent years, the situation has been improved due to interventions undertaken by govt. Due to the pragmatic actions taken by govt., most of the boro harvesting has been done faster using mechanical harvesting/agriculture mechanization. Govt. is providing 70% subsidies for haor area's agriculture mechanization. Considering this context, govt. is paying more attention to climate-vulnerable areas including haor and coastal districts.

The haors also contribute approximately 10% of the total capture fisheries production of Bangladesh. However, this amount has reduced over time due to unmanaged destruction of swamp forest as a result of limited conservation practices by the competent authority, uncontrolled collection of wood for fuel and house construction, agricultural intensification, urbanization, environmental degradation and pollution, and climate change.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- ✓ Finance
- Innovation
- ✓ Human rights
- ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- ✓ Data & Evidence
- ✓ Governance
- Trade-offs
- ✓ Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

Private Sector Involvement: There is scope to involve the private sector in this region and they can work together with the government to increase the diversification of agricultural production (such as flood resilient/ deepwater rice variety). To do this, utilizing the government's khas land will be helpful for increasing production.

Improvement in the mode of Communications: To reach people of this region as well as exporting surplus production, adequate protection facilities is required for roadways from flash floods/heavy rainfall and an efficient storage system are needed.

Modernization of fish Acts: Proper enforcement and modernization of Protection and Conservation of Fish Act (1950), amended by the Protection and Conservation (Amendment) Ordinance (1982) is required, incorporating fishing ban for spawning/ breeding period in haors, stopping catches of female spawning/ brood fishes, limiting catches of small fishes, compensation mechanism for fishers during ban periods, and limiting use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Ensuring proper utilization of local resources and potentials: Unutilized lands (lands left unused owned by migrants, kandas) should be brought under agricultural activities through irrigation and land use ownership initiatives. Small scale fish culture, integrated fish and poultry farming, cattle rearing, duck farming, homestead vegetable gardening, and floating cultivation should be promoted which have good prospects considering the local resources. Ensuring proper access to extension services, financial facilities, and skill development training are some prerequisites for that.

Expanding income-generating options: Due to geographic conditions, people usually remain employed in the boro season. They have a minimum option for work in other seasons which is also true for other parts of Bangladesh. Alternative income generating activities, especially work and small businesses that can be operated from homes should be promoted using local opportunities and resources. Small and cottage industries should be encouraged. These should be targeted more at women as almost 50% of the total district population are female. Govt. is also paying attention in this regard. But the interventions should be strengthened.

Awareness Raising: People need to be more aware of nutrition and food safety. Those who are involved with the production and the supply chain need relevant and adequate capacity and skill development, especially on addressing post-harvest loss and growing climate-resilient crops.

Tourism and effect on Environment: Sunamganj is regarded as a tourist spot and has a good number of people visiting almost through the year. Local administration can formulate rules for tourists to protect and keep the environment clean and safeguard the ecosystem. By doing this, it will be possible to both have tourism as one of the options of livelihood and economic activity and protect the environment.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC

- Availability of diversified, safe and nutritious food

Challenges:

As the area is inundated by water, cultivation of vegetables is limited in the area. Those who grow more vegetables they cannot sell those vegetables to other markets for better profits due to limited transportation facility available during floods/ rainy season.

Mechanization of agriculture in haor areas has been low. There are many areas in the haor basin which do not have irrigation facility and thus, those lands cannot be brought under cultivation during the dry season.

Most of the fishers are very poor and earn little, fishers are having problems with high transport cost.

The cattle are of comparatively lower weights and productivity, and returns are low. Also, poor families often have to sell off their cattle at a very low price during flood/ rainy season due to crisis of food availability.

During the eight months of inundation, women. Although haor areas produce ample fish, most of them are sold to Dhaka or other big cities, and local people do not get to eat enough fish.

Way Forward:

Floating cultivation of vegetables can be a solution to produce vegetables in the rainy season, as is done widely in the Barishal region. During the period immediately after the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season, some short-duration (quick yielding) vegetables can be cultivated.

Unutilized lands should be brought under cultivation for agricultural expansion.

More fish culture should be encouraged. Catching female spawning fishes/ brood fishes should be stopped.

Cattle rearing and duck farming should be modernized with scientific interventions. Integrated fish and poultry farming should be promoted.

- Transformation, delivery, access and role of private sector

Challenges:

The main rivers of Sunamganj have issues of navigability, and this is directly or indirectly reducing fish assemblage, and amplifying the effects of habitat destruction. Small roads that connect different unions with sub-districts are not sufficient here. The number and capacity of storage structures are not up to the required level. There is limited crop diversification.

Way Forward:

It is necessary to construct small roads in Haor areas so that farmers can easily transport their agricultural produce to the mainland. It is essential to establish adequate number of cold storage/warehouses for proper storage of perishable food items. Training should be provided to the farmers to reduce pre-harvest, during harvest and post-harvest loss; o sow high yielding deepwater rice.

- Consumer behaviour, nutrition, and food safety

Challenges:

Due to its geographical context, only one harvest is observed in the haor region. There is also lack of agricultural diversification. Poverty, low level of education, and lack of awareness remain barriers for healthy food consumption. There is a lack of diversity in food consumption. Rice is consumed as the main source of energy, dry fish and red meat are also consumed but there is low consumption of fruits and vegetables. Local fish is exported to other regions affecting the supply of local fish in the market and leading to high price. Fruits and vegetable production is low and is imported from other regions.

Way Forward:

Enhanced nutrition knowledge and awareness are required, especially among school children. Strengthen vitamin A supplementation and capacity of EPI (Expanded Programme on Immunization) Centres are required. Enhance consumer awareness on food adulteration, use of pesticides etc. Ensure food safety of the processed foods. Enhance production of vegetables and fruits.

- Climate vulnerability, inclusion, and governance
years local biodiversity is being affected due to imprudent exploitation of aquaculture resources and water pollution from water-boat engine oil. Access to some of the Upazila is difficult due to problems of river navigation. Seasonal unemployment is comparatively higher in this region.

Way Forward:

Farmers are being encouraged to harvest early Harvesting flood-resistant paddy will help minimize the crisis. The construction of dams can be an effective solution to save the boro crops from flash floods.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

There were no major areas of divergence among participants. In fact, some similar issues were raised and common recommendations were made across the groups.

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