

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Monday, 31 May 2021 10:00 GMT +06:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Sixth Sub-National Dialogue in Kurigram
CONVENED BY	Khaja Abdul Hannan
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/25793/
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

83

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

31-50

51-65

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

72 Male

11 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 through an understanding of the issues facing Kurigram district and the overall region of riverine islands or char, in terms of the pathway to sustainable food systems. Organized by the National Dialogue Committee led by the Ministry of Food, the Dialogue brought 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 chain from production to consumption.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The Dialogue began with familiarising the participants with the context of the Food Systems Summit, the issues being discussed at the global level including the five action tracks and issues to be addressed in Bangladesh to ensure safe and nutritious food for all. Mr. Abdul Hannan, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Food, in his introductory remarks states that there are many ongoing initiatives in the country to increase production and productivity and attain the SDG2 goal of Zero Hunger. Food Systems is a complex issue. He refers the achievement of food self-sufficiency in Bangladesh but also underlined the challenges of malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and unsafe food the country still facing. There are issues of availability and access and 20-25% post-harvest loss (particularly fruits and vegetables); there are problems of adulteration, contamination that make food unsafe; work has to be done on all links of the value chain. He pointed to the importance of highlighting issues facing Kurigram and the char region. Participants were then requested to participate in group discussion in four breakout groups and share their thoughts and ideas. The themes of discussion in the four groups were: • Availability of diversified, safe, and nutritious food • Transformation, delivery, access, and role of private sector • Consumer behaviour, nutrition, and food safety • Climate vulnerability, inclusion, and governance Each group had a facilitator and a note-taker, both members of the national dialogue committee. The facilitator highlighted the focus of the discussion in the group and requested participants to share their views. The key points made in each breakout group were presented by the respective facilitators at the closing plenary, giving an opportunity for participants who had not been in a particular group to further share their opinions/suggestions. It was thus endeavoured to capture the voice of the people and reflect issues specific to the region that may feed into the UNFSS, in a participatory manner.

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

The importance of the participatory approach in capturing the voice of a large majority. It is also important to ensure that regional nuances and challenges faced by 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

Kurigram is a predominantly rural district in northern Bangladesh, bordering India, with 9 sub-districts and 73 unions. The majority of the population of 2.45 million are primarily dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Three major rivers (Brahmaputra, Dharla, and Teesta) flow through the district creating several chars or riverine islands. The district has 400 chars and flooding is a recurrent problem in the region. Paddy is the main crop. Jute, tobacco and vegetables are also cultivated. Fishery is also a major activity. The district has a very high percentage of population living below the national poverty line at 71 per cent, compared to the national average of 24 per cent, indicating its backward status. A study in late 2014 revealed that the region was nutritionally insecure with 35.6 per cent children stunted, incidence of child morbidity among three fourth of children and poor levels of sanitation. Now the situation is getting better but there is enormous scope for improvement.

Some of the major challenges faced by the dwellers are river erosion, floods, and recurring floods visiting every year. According to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Kurigram is one of the most erosion-prone districts of the country. People usually lose cultivable lands, crops, homes, and other private property every year. A Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report shows that all the Upazilas (sub-districts) of the district faced river erosion throughout the years from 2008 to 2011. More recent reports suggest that riverbank erosion has taken a serious turn as Teesta, Dharla, Dudhkumar, and Brahmaputra rivers in Kurigram swell due to incessant rainfall and onrush of water from India. In 2020, around 500 acres of farmland and 430 houses of Kurigram vanished into the Teesta in just two months. As people become landless, the rate of migration (forced migration) is very high, especially among the char-dwellers, which makes it more difficult to bring them under any social safety net coverage or public services.

Institutional response and policy interventions are required for sustainable rehabilitation of the people displaced by riverbank erosions. Integrated infrastructural development is required to prevent riverbank erosion and loss of private and public properties in the Sirajganj-Kurigram-Gaibandha basin. Besides, efficient management of water flows of the transboundary rivers (Jamuna, Brahmaputra, Teesta) is required as a long-term solution to the recurring floods.

Kurigram district is now self-sufficient in food-grain production particularly rice. There is also diversified production of vegetables. There are nutrition councils at the district and sub-district levels, national nutrition week is observed and nutrition advocacy is undertaken with the help of NGOs. There are ongoing pilot programs like the distribution of zinc fortified rice to vulnerable populations through the public food distribution programs, and nutrient-fortified biscuits to school students. The COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools have affected the dissemination of nutrition messages to some extent. Convergence between different departments and bringing together people's representatives, civil society organizations and youth on one platform will help. Data gaps have to be addressed, to enhance effective delivery.

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

MAIN FINDINGS

Flood management and flood-resilient infrastructure development: As floods and subsequent river erosion are major hindrances in food production and securing sustainable livelihood, long-term and well-planned flood management initiatives are required. Establishment of long-lasting flood control embankments and dams, constructing flood-resilient transportation and communication systems, and integrated water management initiatives to efficiently manage water flows of the major rivers can be some of the measures that will keep food production, transportation, and access to markets uninterrupted during floods and other natural disasters.

Flood-resilient agricultural practices and crop diversification: Promoting cultivation of flood-resilient crop varieties, reserving flood water or rainwater during monsoon in surface water bodies to be used for irrigation during the dry season, and extending floating/hydroponic cultivation can help to prevent crop loss due to heavy rain and flood. Also, extending cultivation to more profitable crops or cash crops beyond the main crops (paddy, maize, wheat, potato) can increase profitability for farmers.

Efficient use of lands/ soils and other natural resources: More efficient use of soils can be ensured by promoting the cultivation of crops according to the soil quality (soil type, micro-nutrients present in the soil), decided through soil testing. Also, the phasing of cropping should be matched with weather conditions and other natural traits. This will enhance productivity and reduce misuse of inputs like fertilizers.

Infrastructure development for preservation of crops and food processing facilities: Small farmers sell out their produce (especially rice) right after harvesting, as monsoon and flood come immediately after, and farmers do not have storage facilities to save their crops from the wet weather, even for their own consumption. So they do not get fair price of their product. Unfortunately, farmers and poor families have to buy back those staple crops at the higher price for consumption. Considering this tough condition, the governmental godwan crop loan program needs to be expanded. Additionally, providing small farmers with access to shared storage facilities can end this vicious cycle which makes them poorer. Notably, Government has initiated establish 200 paddy silo across the country aiming to purchase paddy directly from the farmers to ensure their fair price. Moreover, the government has declared 100 economic zones throughout the country where establish of small and medium scale food processing industries are highly encouraged. However, private investment in this sector is crucial and the government shall encourage the private sector by providing low-interest credit facilities..

Preventing loss of nutrients and food values during processing: The staple crops such as, rice and maize lose their micronutrients contained in the brans (the hard outer layers of cereal grains) when those are processed in mills to produce refined grains. The government has started promoting GAP, GMP, GHP etc that is well-coordinated to the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority. Capacity development and awareness building training are being provided so that the quality and safety of food can be kept well. However, technologies are required to process the grains in a way so that the loss of brans can be prevented while milling and whole grain cereals can be produced mechanically for all locally grown crops. This will help to overcome the nutrition deficiency and fortification of staple crops will not be required anymore.

Nurturing the dairy and fisheries sector: Kurigram has good prospects to grow as a major player in the dairy industry, as it is rich in milk production. However, it lacks milk chilling, storage, and processing facilities, which is hindering the small farms to grow into large commercial farms. Encouraging public and private investments in the sector and ensuring access to extension services for farmers can ease up the barrier. Also, Kurigram can focus more on fresh water fish culture as it has abundant sources of fresh water, however, support such as, access to inputs (feeds, seeds/fingerlings) and extension services are required for that.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC

- Availability of diversified, safe and nutritious food

Challenges:

Farmers face a number of obstacles to take their produce in markets in urban areas. Particularly remote access and the char landscape are not so suitable for easy move as they are to cross the river to reach the market. Therefore, farmers are compelled to sell their products to middlemen at low price and get deprived of having fair price.

Way Forward:

Local animal breeds should be promoted. There is scope for both developing dairy, goatery and poultry as viable activities for both income and nutrition. Fodder production also needs to be promoted. Indigenous fish breeds should be promoted. Governmental support for the fishers during fish ban period need to be extended by expanding coverage, quantity, and time.

Flood and drought-tolerant crop varieties should be promoted. There is a need for the promotion of technology for and training in safe food production.

- Transformation, delivery, access and role of private sector

Challenges: There are many issues that affect the food chain. Lack of proper transport and handling infrastructure for meat is another challenge. In the case of poultry, the trade is controlled by a poultry syndicate of 3-4 middlemen who exploit the small poultry farmers by buying at low price from them, and then selling to consumers at high price. Packaging is also not done properly with required information like date of manufacture and date of expiry. Cold storage is available for potatoes but not for other vegetables/fruits. Due to lack of storage facility, the rice produced in the district goes out and is brought back at a high cost.

Traditional rice mills have been replaced by automated rice mills that polish rice and remove all nutrients. Necessary measures have to be taken to stop this.

Way Forward:

Problems of excess production, glut and steep fall in price can thereby be avoided. Farmers should be advised based on soil testing as to what crop will grow best in the soil and awareness created on the harmful effects of overuse of chemical fertilizers. Focus crops should be identified at district and sub-division levels for postharvest processing and value addition.

Market and storage infrastructure is required and transport infrastructure has to be improved. An adequate number of rice godowns needs to be established so that farmers can get benefits like cold storage for potatoes.. There should be a storage facility in the district to storing an adequate amount of rice for mitigating its own requirement and then supply to other places if there is any surplus.

- Consumer behaviour, nutrition, and food safety

Challenges: The government is giving more importance to intensify food-based social safety net program in this area. The food environment in local restaurants/bakeries needs improvement. The implementation of food safety regulations and guidelines on hygiene practices needs to be strengthened.

There is enough supply of micronutrients, and iron and folic acid tablets are distributed among pregnant and lactating women. However, coverage of nutrition programme is less in urban compared to rural areas. Poverty and lack of education remain the main challenges for the consumption of nutritious foods.

Way Forward: Increased awareness regarding balanced diet among both producers and consumers and effective implementation of programmes targeting children, pregnant and lactating women are required. Coverage of nutrition programmes has to be enhanced in urban areas. Need to enhance the awareness programme on healthy diet, food safety, hygiene practices. Mass awareness programme on diversified food consumption is required.

- Climate vulnerability, inclusion, and governance

Challenges:

Natural calamities such as flood and river erosion, and migration are the main challenges of this region. Flood and river erosion is a common phenomenon that displaces many peoples every year. This causes people's migration,

Way forward:

- Proper measures for river control may reduce riverbank erosion
- Local resource-based industry need to be established
- Support for SMEs and new entrepreneurs
- awareness raising

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		✓	Environment and Climate

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

There were no major areas of divergence among participants.

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