

Evaluation of the Agricultural Growth and Employment Programme (AGEP), Bangladesh

Summary, management response and follow up note (November 2019)

1. Introduction

This note summarises the main findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from an evaluation of the Agricultural Growth and Employment Programme (AGEP) in Bangladesh undertaken between December 2018 and July 2019. The note includes the management response and follow up proposals drafted by the Danish Embassy in Dhaka. EVAL commissioned and managed the evaluation which was carried out by an independent team of international consultants working with Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) and Orbicon.

2. Summary of the evaluation

Denmark has a long history of supporting development of the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors in Bangladesh, dating back to the 1970s. Since the 1990s the "farmer field school" (FFS) approach has constituted a key element in the sector programmes funded by Danida. This evaluation concerns the use of the FFS approach within the Danish-supported Agricultural Growth and Employment Programme (AGEP) in the period 2013-2018.

The overall objective of the evaluation is to document achievements and analyse the outcomes and impact from FFS in AGEP since 2013. Based on this, the evaluation should prepare recommendations for the future as inputs for the design of a new Danish country programme in Bangladesh (for the period 2021-2026).

Farmer field schools as implemented in AGEP

The FFS approach was developed by FAO in the late 1980s and is a group-based learning and empowerment process. The FFS approach is participatory and community-based; the learning takes place in the field in small groups doing comparative studies/experiments, where farmers learn together and from each other. In AGEP, the FFS approach has been practiced within two components: i) the Integrated Farm Management Component (IFMC), implemented in seven regions¹ of Bangladesh by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) within the Ministry of Agriculture; and ii) the Agriculture and Food Security Project (AFSP) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The total budget of AGEP was DKK 405 million², out of which DKK 300 million were allocated for IFMC and DKK 45 million for AFSP.³

¹ Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal, Khulna, Chittagong and Sylhet.

² DKK 75 million were contributed by the Government of Bangladesh.

³ DKK 50 million were allocated for Katalyst and DKK 10 million were unallocated funds.

There are notable differences in the way FFS has been implemented in IFMC and AFSP. First, the conditions in CHT are very different from those of the Bangladeshi lowlands. This includes lower starting points in productivity, different governance systems, less market influences, etc. Second, AFSP has been a much smaller programme, implemented through a project modality while IFMC has been implemented country-wide through a government agency (DAE). Furthermore, whereas farmers in IFMC were encouraged to form Farmers Organisations (FOs) after finalising FFS, this was not the case in AFSP where this element was not included.

The main emphasis in this evaluation has been on IFMC, since an end-evaluation of ASFP had already been conducted.⁴ The assessment of IFMC has included implementation of a household survey (as a follow-up to an earlier baseline study) as well as qualitative fieldwork in four regions; two in the North (Rangpur and Rajshahi) and two in the South (Barisal and Chittagong (Feni District)). For AFSP, the focus has been on validation and triangulation of findings from the end-evaluation (which included a household survey) through a qualitative fieldwork mission to CHT.

Key findings from the evaluation

FFS has been a relevant approach to support rural development in the Bangladeshi context. The FFS approach is fully in line with the Government of Bangladesh's Vision 2021 and the 7th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), which have been aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is emphasized in these plans that income distribution should be significantly improved, leading to a faster pace of poverty reduction, by prioritising policies, institutions and programmes that are supporting lowering of income inequality and empowering of citizens. In addition, the farmer segment targeted by FFS (landless and marginal farmers) has been complementary to the target group of the DAE mainstreaming approach, which mainly focuses on medium and small-scale farmers. The FFS approach has therefore fitted well with Bangladesh's current development strategy and planning, in relation to the SDGs.

There are significant impacts from the FFS approach but a reduced pro-poor profile. FFS has contributed to a significant increase in household income through increases and diversification of production, both in IFMC and AFSP. On average, the impact from FFS on household income has been close to Bangladesh Taka (BDT) 10,000 annually, equivalent to an average monthly household income for the benefiting households. In particular, farm income from poultry and eggs, vegetable gardening and fish production has contributed to significant higher income increase in FFS households compared to a group of control households. It is important to note however, that the income effects have been more significant for the relatively richer households than for the poorest households.

FFS households have also reduced their vulnerability and increased their intake of most food items significantly more than control village households. FFS has contributed to a significant reduction in the risk of food crises in households in both IFMC and AFSP and nutrition aspects

⁴ End-Evaluation/Impact Assessment for Agriculture and Food Security Project (AFSP) Phase II, prepared by IRG Development Services Ltd. on behalf of UNDP, July 2018.

have been improved, mainly through enhanced homestead gardening and poultry production as well as massive awareness raising campaigns (not only through AGEP). In terms of employment, the evaluation found examples where more youth and women (outside family labour) were being employed in farm production and in service functions, such as vaccination, but employment generation as a result of FFS was modest. Although the evaluation found indications of some spill-over effects from FFS farmers to non-FFS farmers within FFS villages, there seems to be potential for larger impact in this area.

Quality issues were identified in relation to FFS curriculum and training of farmers.

The time-consuming exploratory learning in IFMC-FFS has been reduced due to a combination of more subjects in the curriculum, an increased number of modules and sessions being shortened. Bringing numerous different topics (rice, vegetables, poultry, cows, fish, nutrition, etc.) into the same FFS has made it difficult to cover all topics in a participatory and experiential way. The exploratory element of FFS, building on using the farmers' own skills and experience from the field and encouraging them to apply these experiences in problem solving, has only happened to a limited extent in practice. This has also impacted negatively on maximizing the effect of training in, for instance, Integrated Pest Management (IPM). In addition, challenges related to the scaling up process have been identified, especially organisational and logistic issue have been problematic. In AFSP, the training has been conducted mainly by using an FFS approach that is still exploratory or at least participatory.

Many of the FFS facilitators conducting the training in IFMC had limited experience as facilitators and, due to the many different modules included in the FFS, they had to deal with topics outside their own area of experience. In addition, the facilitators have been supervised and guided by DAE staff, who are mainly crop experts, with limited knowledge of fish, livestock, poultry, nutrition and women's empowerment. All this has contributed to lowering the quality of the FFS. In AFSP the access to extension services appeared more impressive and could be augmented further by increased use of systematized farmer-to-farmer extension.

There was bias in the selection of FFS participants and facilitators. Although the majority of the selected FFS participants in IFMC have been landless and marginal farmers, in many cases they have not come from the poorest and most vulnerable farmers within these groups. Likewise, while the FFS guidelines encouraged participation of female-headed households/widows, only relatively few participants belonged to this group. The guidelines and supervision process for selection of participants have not been sufficient to avoid relatively richer and more powerful farmers within the communities often being preferred for participating in the FFS.

Whereas there has been an equal distribution of male and female farmers, there has been an unequal representation of men and women as FFS facilitators. In both IFMC and AFSP only one in four facilitators were women. It seems that this, to a larger extent, is more a reflection of cultural barriers than a lack of interest among women to become facilitators. In the Bangladeshi context women are not considered farmers, although they are increasingly engaged in agriculture.

There are mixed results on adoption of new skills and farming techniques. The evaluation found a relatively high uptake among farmers of the new simpler technologies promoted by FFS in both IFMC and AFSP. The farmers in the South seemed generally more

motivated than farmers in the North to learn and adopt new technologies to boost development in their area. Likewise, the uptake was higher in AFSP than in IFMC. The evaluation found that the difference in uptake was to some extent explained by the difference in participants' motivation to apply and adopt new FFS techniques in the two geographical areas. The number of NGO and Government of Bangladesh (GoB) implemented projects are larger in the North than in the South, thus more opportunities for support already exist in the North. The uptake of the more advanced technologies introduced by FFS in IFMC was found to be much lower. This was mainly explained by the reduced quality of the FFS and, in particular, that the explorative learning had been reduced.

Women have been empowered but challenges remain, in particular on mobility. In IFMC, FFS has contributed to positive changes in relation to women's participation in decision-making processes e.g. on how to make use of income and on adoption of new farming technologies. Women have also become more involved in selling and marketing processes and they feel more confident now when speaking in public. Although women's mobility has also improved, it is still a constraining factor that most women are not allowed to go to markets on their own and thereby benefit from FFS on the same terms as men. In terms of ownership and access to productive resources, FFS has not contributed to larger female control over household assets.

In AFSP, FFS has contributed to ethnic minority women having acquired more access and partial control over income, especially income from poultry and homestead gardening. This has positively affected women's position in the household, leading to larger involvement in decision-making. This is a considerable change compared to five years ago, when both ethnic minority and ethnic Bengali women were reluctant to participate in FFS, while now they are even joining community events. The same change has, however, not materialized with Bengali women in CHT.

There are shortcomings in the implementation of the farmer's organisations model. The developed and applied model for establishing and training of FOs in IFMC has not worked as intended and implementation has been done with insufficient testing and learning. Both the reasons for establishing the FOs, as well as the level of functionality of these organisations varied a lot across villages. In several cases the FO leaders had been selected due to political relationships rather than through a participatory process.

The evaluation findings also show that FFS has resulted in FFS households more actively applying marketing practices than non-FFS households. At the same time, the evaluation found large variations in the benefits from the market linkages training. Women have gained more access to markets through FOs with the establishment of collection points.

FFS has been cost-effective but institutional weaknesses were identified. Cost calculations show that FFS has been a very cost-effective investment in both IFMC and AFSP, with a pay-back time of 1-1.5 year. On the other hand, it is also clear from the evaluation that the current institutional arrangements for FFS in both IFMC and AFSP are not able to continue without the substantial external financial support.

The evaluation findings show that both a number of the hoped-for strengths and envisioned challenges from working with a government-led model have materialized in IFMC. The FFS

approach has indeed been scaled up and substantial results have been delivered. At the same time, issues regarding management and supervision, quality, fidelity, etc., have been encountered and have influenced performance. AFSP has applied a different division of labour between line departments and implementing partners (not just UNDP but also NGOs) and both the costs and quality of the support have been higher than in IFMC. While it cannot simply be assumed that such a multi-actor model would be effective or efficient if simply transferred to other parts of Bangladesh, the different forms of partnerships may be explored.

One of the aims of the IFMC was to strengthen the national dialogue on farmer-centred approaches by establishing a national platform. The Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network has been founded under the leadership of DAE and includes as members other government departments and institutions (notably Department of Fisheries (DoF) and Department of Livestock Services (DLS)), NGOs and national and international extension organisations. This is clearly an important achievement as a foundation for future dialogue.

Main Conclusions

The relevance of applying a FFS approach has remained high within the Bangladeshi context over the period of evaluation in support to the country's efforts to become a Lower Middle-Income country and graduate from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a developing country. However, more support and efforts may be needed to bring the positive experiences from use of the FFS approach more effectively into national policy development and implementation processes.

The FFS approach, as implemented in both IFMC and AFSP, has delivered several positive results along the lines of the hoped-for changes in AGEP. Since 2013, almost one million poor people (representing close to half a million households) in rural Bangladesh have benefitted directly from new knowledge and techniques related to agricultural production and nutrition introduced through FFS in AGEP. The impact from FFS on household income, food security, diversification of agricultural production, women's empowerment and nutrition has been significant.

The scaling-up of FFS in IFMC, and especially the combination of many training modules into one package, has led to reduced quality of the FFS training. The approach of exploratory learning has been diluted in most FFS training in IFMC and is a main reason for the decline in quality. The training has still been of sufficient quality to lead to positive results in production and income, albeit not as good as in earlier phases.⁵

Favouritism and clientelism in the process of selection of FFS villages and participants in IFMC has to some extent led to exclusion of the poorest farmers from participating. While the upscaling of FFS has made it possible to support a large group of farmers who would not be reached through DAE's mainstreaming approach, the support has, at the same time, had a weaker pro-poor profile compared to previous programme phases.

AGEP has contributed to a significant enhancement of women's empowerment within FFS households. However, persisting challenges and barriers for women's mobility and decision-making power in relation to farm management need to be addressed

⁵ See the 2011 Evaluation: https://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/Eval_reports/publicationdisplaypage/?publicationID=A0FF4F7B-8CDA-43C2-81F3-3E6086B2C3D3

more explicitly. This would require a more holistic approach to rural livelihood and farming systems, where farming will be seen as a family business and gender inequalities addressed in a more co-operative manner with women and men.

The decision to implement the FO model and market-oriented activities in IFMC through a government institution (DAE) has lowered the quality. DAE has had insufficient capacity and shown limited interest to implement these activities along the lines of the programme design and does not appear to be the right partner in this area. In addition, targets have been too ambitious considering a complex context, large geographical coverage and the level of financial and human resources allocated.

FFS as implemented in IFMC has shown signs of institutional weaknesses and management challenges at various levels affecting the efficiency of the interventions. The dual and decentralised management structure applied for programme implementation has not worked as intended, the established M&E system has only been partly functional in support of managerial and operational activities, and the set-up for backstopping and quality assurance included inherent risks for inefficiencies.

Despite high cost-effectiveness from the supported interventions, the evaluation of the FFS approach raises critical questions about the future, not least in relation to IPM, finance and institutional partnerships. Important areas such as IPM in relation to high value crops have not been sufficiently covered by the interventions. Institutional arrangements and finance for future FFS support are still unclear and, while it is unlikely that DAE will have the capacity and capability to continue with the FFS approach on its own, alternative institutional and financial modalities for FFS have not been tested as part of IFMC.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Future development interventions in Bangladesh, aiming at reducing vulnerability and livelihoods among poor rural households, should continue making use of the FFS approach, incorporating the recommendations given below to address current weaknesses and opportunities. This should also include concerns about bearing the costs of adaptation to climate change in Bangladesh, which have major implications for the most vulnerable. In view of a recent slowdown in the pace of poverty reduction and increased inequality in Bangladesh, a properly designed FFS approach with an explicit pro-poor focus could contribute to reversing these trends, as it is able to foster a rise in income as well as improved food security and nutrition amongst poor farmers even in the short-term.

Recommendation 2: Season-long exploratory learning should be brought back as the heart of the FFS approach in Bangladesh. This will be crucial to ensure that not only technologies are introduced but also that FFS will stimulate, encourage and empower farmers to develop problem-solving skills and have the confidence to apply them on other innovative and developing practices. This will include a review of the curriculum and that FFS become more focused (fewer modules and participants in one FFS). FFS participants should get more influence on selection of modules, based on their needs and priorities. A more flexible household approach, where a couple could split up and attend different FFS sessions, could be explored. FFS facilitators should have practical experience in the topic that they teach. Furthermore, in view of the general trend for production of more high-value crops, it appears

important to develop FFS curricula for these crops and ensure that IPM is adequately addressed. The possibility for including follow-up visits to FFS participants from facilitators (after completion of FFS) should be further explored, based on the positive experiences from AFSP.

Recommendation 3: *Current guidelines and procedures for selection of FFS/FO participants and group composition should be reviewed and more clearly defined, emphasising inclusion and focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable farmers.* This will imply some clear choices in a future Danish country programme, including: i) more narrow definition and targets for inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable farmers (e.g. more clear definition of vulnerability, more strict requirements concerning land access and ownership, specific targets for participation of female-headed and other vulnerable household groups); and ii) a stronger supervision of the selection process at a time when changes in rural power structures in Bangladesh have been observed, which are making it more difficult for the power-poor to be included in development projects such as FFS.

Recommendation 4: *Future FFS interventions should include a broader definition of women's empowerment as well as inclusion of more specific goals and targets.* While AGEP basically has focused on women's participation and income, other relevant parameters to include in a women's empowerment definition would be time consumption, ability to speak in public, decision-making, mobility and control of assets, etc. Close cooperation should be ensured with other programmes working in this area in Bangladesh (such as IFPRI). The current approach for identification and employment of facilitators should be revisited to ensure a more equal gender balance with a particular view to strengthening women's participation as facilitators.

Recommendation 5: *The approach to establishing and training of FOs should be reconsidered.* This should include an assessment of alternative partnerships to DAE. The approach to training should be based on the principles and praxis of exploratory learning and could well focus on farmer clubs (and similar groups) already developed in previous Danida supported programmes. Any new model should be well piloted and tested before scaling up.

Recommendation 6: *A more effective management information and monitoring system should be established for subsequent FFS programmes/phases.* This should include: i) a Baseline Study that will be designed, conducted and preserved to make it as useful as possible for ex-post evaluation. Due to the complexity of this process, an expert with required skills and expertise should be consulted; ii) a performance monitoring system for FOs should be established based on a few, easily collected indicators; and iii) the monitoring system should include specific targets and indicators for measurement of women's empowerment and qualitative participation, spill-over effects from FFS as well as of direct and indirect employment effects from FFS and FOs.

Recommendation 7: *Continued support should be provided to the Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network as a platform for national dialogue on farmer-centred approaches and multi-actor consultation.* This could ultimately lead to involvement of a broader group of key stakeholders in planning and implementation of FFS. By implication, there is a need to continue the process of establishing and strengthening the national dialogue, and to ensure that Danida continues to engage in advocacy for the various important aspects

of the FFS approach. This includes support to policy development, such as development of a gender policy in the DAE.

Recommendation 8: *Alternative "FFS models" should be piloted to make the support as self-financing and best practice oriented as possible (such as establishing of FFS networks and commercialization of services and income-generating activities).*

Strengthening of peer training networks should also be considered a key element for development of an approach more focused on sustainability, including with a view to promoting larger spill-over effects and encouraging FFS farmers to share information with others. Here it will be important to build further on the combined experiences from IFMC and AFSP (working with national partners, NGOs, project unit vs. GoB management, the role of GoB line departments; use of different approaches for selection and use of trainers/facilitators etc.).

3. Management response

General comments

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) welcomes the evaluation of AGEP. As emphasized in the mid-term review of the Bangladesh Country Programme 2016-2021, many of the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation were discussed in connection with the Danida appraisal of the second phase of IFMC (2019-2021). During the appraisal, it was noted that the FFS training under IFMC I had developed into a much too mechanistic approach, aiming at quantity but failing to fully respect the basic principles of FFS. Obviously, the up-scaling under IFMC I has had an adverse effect on the quality.

The FFS approach is based on the fact that the best learning takes place by doing, rather than telling. The facilitator does not lecture the farmers, but rather helps them to learn by asking questions and building on their experience and observations. Farmers are thus encouraged to make their own discoveries and draw their own conclusions. The FFS approach aims at empowering the farmers and making them capable of analysing and solving the problems they encounter – an aspect that was not taken sufficiently into account in IFMC I.⁶ The appraisal therefore recommended to: i) put more emphasis on the empowerment aspects of the FFS approach; ii) invest more efforts in each FFS and market linkage group, rather than aim for quantity only; and, iii) concentrate IFMC II geographically. The IFMC II appraisal furthermore recommended strengthening the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity. The mid-term review concludes that the appraisal recommendations (being largely consistent with the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation), have subsequently been addressed and included in the final IFMC II Development Engagement Document signed with the DAE in August this year.

⁶ The different empowerment aspects of the FFS approach include (as reflected in the IFMC Operational Manual): i) 'economic empowerment' (e.g. obtained through improved farming management skills, commercial skills and improved access to markets); ii) 'personal empowerment' (e.g. increased self-confidence, awareness of rights and responsibilities/duties, critical and analytical thinking); and, iii) 'social empowerment' (e.g. obtained through the emphasis on group work and group formation, leadership development, abilities to deal with community issues and to formulate and pursue needs through contacts with public institutions and markets agents at a higher level).

The expected graduation of Bangladesh from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2024 will likely have implications for the Danish-Bangladeshi partnership, moving the partnership gradually “from aid to trade”. It is thus likely that the next phase of the Bangladesh country engagement (2021-2026) will be the last to employ “traditional” Danida development instruments on a large scale. The remainder of the current phase of the Bangladesh Country Programme 2016-2021 will therefore aim at consolidating the results achieved through long-standing engagements with many of the current implementing partners, including the DAE and the UNDP. Looking to the future, the next phase of the Bangladesh Country Engagement will help inform the strategizing, conceptualization and establishment of a new Danish-Bangladeshi partnership beyond 2026.

As a result, and after more than two decades of Danish support to DAE to implement and mainstream FFS into the national extensions system, the Danish Embassy and the DAE have agreed that IFMC II constitutes an exit phase and thus marks the end of the long-standing Danida-DAE partnership. Specific exit phase activities will consequently be carried out with the aim of:

- Consolidating efforts in terms of focusing on the sustainability of Danish support to the FFS approach through internalising learnings and best practises into DAE’s policy and manual frameworks.
- Documenting learning and results in terms of: a) undertaking applied impact pathway research as an integrated part of IFMC II’s results monitoring; b) building on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation and c) producing a small ‘legacy’ publication on the “footprints” of 25 years of the Danida-DAE partnership.
- Communicating results in terms of: a) formulating a communication strategy during the IFMC II inception phase and b) carrying out a number of communication efforts in line with Danish policies and strategies.
- Orderly phasing out and completing required financial and activity end-reporting.

Signalling a new approach to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in Bangladesh, and based on lessons learned from previous and ongoing engagements under the Country Programme, Denmark will consolidate results achieved from its national focus on livelihood improvements, rural economic development and climate resilience with a focus on women and youth.

Consequently, Denmark will increasingly focus support around the linkages between agricultural supply and demand markets – more specifically between poor smallholder farmers and their producer organisations on the one hand and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) within the agribusiness sector on the other. The aim is to enhance value addition throughout the value chain, thereby improving markets and employment opportunities for the poor farmers while stimulating private sector growth through agribusiness development. Climate smart solutions and strategies for adapting to challenges in the supply market will increasingly serve as a guiding principle. In line with the UN guiding principles on business and human rights, the new private sector development approach will emphasize issues such as climate and environment, gender equality, youth, social protection, and human rights including the rights of workers. Realising that markets do not automatically work in favour of the poor, Denmark will strive to ensure that increased profit and value addition benefit all value chain actors, including smallholder farmers.

To this end, the Danish Embassy has earlier this year been approached by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Bangladesh with a proposal for grant financing of a technical assistance component of the IFAD loan financed Rural Microenterprise Transformation Project (RMTP). The RMTP goal is to sustainably increase the income, food security and nutrition of marginal and small farmers and micro-entrepreneurs across selected value chains.

The project has two interlinked main components:

- Component 1: Value Chain Enhancement. This component will enable 445,000 micro-enterprises to expand their activities through adoption of efficient production methods, compliance with internationally recognised food safety and traceability standards, and strong market linkages. It will contribute to creating an enabling environment that promotes the growth of micro and small enterprises, and strengthens their linkages with the agribusinesses and other value chain actors. It has five sub-components: i) organisation of producers; ii) provision of technical and business services (including GGAP compliance) to producers through private advisory services; iii) integration of actors across selected value chains; iv) strengthening of downstream agribusinesses (including GGAP and HACCP compliance as required); and, v) policy dialogue with Government.
- Component 2: Financial Services. This component will provide sustainable financial services to micro-enterprises and to growing/larger enterprises and agribusinesses. It has three sub-components: i) provision of financial services to microenterprises through partner organisations (microfinance institutions); ii) provision of commercial finance to larger microenterprises as well as small/medium agribusiness companies, through non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs); and, iii) optimal utilisation of remittances through training to the family members of overseas workers.

Under RMTP, women will be specifically targeted through: i) selection of commodities/value chains in which women are heavily involved (poultry, livestock, homestead production, high value horticulture); ii) focus on activities in which women are disproportionately involved (such as post-harvest and basic processing activities); iii) customised skills training, business training and financial literacy for both enterprise operation and command over household expenditure; iv) nutrition training and focused awareness communication; v) access to financial services; vi) creation of an enabling environment for women's participation. All planning and monitoring indicators will be gender-disaggregated, while the assessment of value chain activities will include indicators to assess gender impact.

During inception of the project, the Danish Embassy as a co-financer will ensure that years of experience and lessons learned from working with the FFS approach to farmer training, organisation and empowerment with both the DAE and UNDP will be incorporated into the implementation of RMTP. It will also be important to review the lessons learned from arrangements with UNDP as the funding agreement with IFAD is developed. The conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation will be instrumental to this effort.

Moreover, the conclusions and recommendations will inform and direct necessary adjustments to the ongoing phase of AFSP III as well as the ongoing implementation of the UNDP Host Community Project in Cox's Bazar. Also, the evaluation will be utilized in the upcoming formulation of a newly envisaged development engagement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts under the next Country Engagement.

Comments on Recommendation 1

The MoFA is pleased to learn that the FFS approach to inclusive and sustainable economic development and poverty reduction is deemed relevant. The MoFA is in agreement with the recommendation and will strive to ensure that relevant elements of the FFS approach are appropriately incorporated into future Country Engagement activities within the area of pro-poor growth and employment. Also, the MoFA will strive to ensure that climate resilience is better integrated into the FFS approach – both in terms of current development activities (where feasible) and under the next country engagement.

Comments on Recommendation 2

The MoFA is in full agreement with the recommendation. In the ongoing implementation of IFMC II and AFSP III, the MoFA will strive to ensure that the FFS approach is based on quality rather than quantity, meaning that the exploratory approach to learning should be brought back to the heart of economic, social and personal empowerment of the beneficiaries. The specific evaluation recommendations and suggestions on how to do this will be explored during the implementation of relevant development engagements under the current Country Programme (2016-2021). As part of the identification and formulation of the next Country Engagement (2021-2026), Danida will strive to ensure that relevant elements of the FFS approach to empowerment of the rural poor be utilised where feasible.

Comments on Recommendation 3

The MoFA finds the analysis of rural power structures and their impact on project implementation and results achievement extremely informative and helpful. The evaluation findings in terms of selection bias are recognized as a long-standing challenge to IFMC implementation. Selection criteria and closer monitoring of these have been reinforced in the IFMC II implementation manuals and will be the subject of attention during project implementation. Also, the analysis of rural power structures will help inform the design and formulation of new development activities under the next Country Engagement.

Comments on Recommendation 4

The MoFA is glad to note the many positive findings of the evaluation in terms of women's empowerment where significant progress has been recorded. At the same time it is recognized that in relation to more structural gender parameters (decision-making in relation to larger farm assets management, freedom of movement etc.) progress has been less evident. Realizing the intrinsic structural limitations to more down-stream gender empowerment, the MoFA will strive to ensure that gender empowerment is maintained as a focus area within ongoing Country Programme activities in relation to pro poor growth and employment. Looking

forward, the MoFA will strive to ensure that more gender specific goals and targets are incorporated into new development activities under the next Country Engagement.

Comments on Recommendation 5

The MoFA agrees with this recommendation. Realizing that IFMC II is an exit phase with limited scope, the MoFA will explore opportunities to ensure that this is dealt with in both ongoing and future development activities within the area of pro poor growth and employment.

Comments on Recommendation 6

The MoFA is in agreement with this recommendation and will explore the opportunities for enhancing existing relevant M&E set-ups to accommodate the suggestions where feasible. The recommendation will (where relevant) inform the identification and formulation of development activities under the next Country Engagement.

Comments on Recommendation 7

In principle the MoFA agrees with this recommendation and will explore the opportunities in current development activities on how to maintain a policy focus on the FFS approach as a modality for farmer extension, training and organization. Experiences and lessons learned from Integrated Pest Management (IPM) activities under the FFS approach will be prioritized in order to enhance a policy focus on Danida and IFAD priorities in terms of safer food and sustainable production methods across the selected value chains/agricultural sub-sectors. These efforts could potentially be tied to possible Strategic Sector Cooperation between the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration and the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority. As IFMC II is the exit phase of the long-standing partnership between Danida and the DAE, opportunities for assisting in mainstreaming the FFS approach into the extension service delivery of DAE will be explored, realizing the limitations of such an endeavor. Also, the recommendation will be pursued within RMTP where enhanced policy dialogue is an output under the outcome pertaining to improved production methods and enhancement of sustainable market linkages.

Comments on Recommendation 8

In principle the MoFA agrees with this recommendation. Opportunities within RMTP will be explored in order to ensure that alternative FFS models be piloted as self-financing privatized modalities of farmer extension, training and organization service delivery. Experiences and lessons learned from IPM activities will be in focus in order to promote Danida and IFAD priorities in terms of safer food and sustainable production methods across the selected value chains/agricultural sub-sectors. The RMTP approach of pairing value chain development with access to financial services and business development services could very well be an opportune occasion for testing out innovative approaches to alternative income-generating FFS models. Realizing that IFMC II is an exit phase of the long-standing partnership between Danida and DAE, opportunities for sustaining alternative approaches to FFS in collaboration with the DAE will be explored if and where feasible.