In the period of 2013-2014, SaFaL formed 1,000 Producer Groups (PG) covering 57,000 farmers, which is the backbone of the project for developing the capacities of the farmers for sustainable farm management practices, creating market accessibility and access to modern technologies, certification to sustainability standards, creating access to quality inputs and financial services. The Producer Groups (PGs) are consolidating their position as a unique platform to gather information, acquire skills, share experiences and discuss relevant issues to improve their farm productivity and household wellbeing.

Majority of the PG members believe that their collective approach would lead them towards a better market engagement not only to sell their farm produces, but also source inputs and access resources and services. The gender dynamics and power relations are transforming, resulting in greater empowerment of women. The engagement of women in various sub-sectors is increasing, most notably aquaculture (which had a very low percentage of women members), also has increased considerably from 8% to 17%. Through adoption of new technologies, establishment of linkages with market and service providers, and the diversification of food and nutritional awareness, the PG members, especially women are experiencing improvements in their labour productivity and household well-being.

From The Country Manager

Solidaridad’s SaFaL is facilitating to improve the productivity of smallholder farmers through improved farm management practices, improving access to quality inputs, reducing the use of agro-chemicals, and introducing new production practices. SaFaL is undertaking an integrated approach to make agriculture more productive through developing business models that increases income and employment opportunities for thousands of farmers and supply chain actors in southwest Bangladesh. It is transforming the market system to promote access and availability of nutritious food to feed the growing population. It is developing multi-stakeholders cooperation and engagement to improve efficiency in the backward and forward market linkages towards developing responsible production and consumption practices.

This newsletter reflects some of the key accomplishments of SaFaL in recent times in the areas of adaptation of technologies and promotion of inclusive supply chain development in aquaculture, horticulture and dairy, including improving nutrition and dietary practices.
Women Farmers Increasingly Participating In SaFaL Supported Supply Chain

SaFaL's effective gender transformative strategies are resulting in greater empowerment of women for their productive engagement in agriculture and control over income. Their proactive engagement has made the Producer Groups more vibrant, where women now constitute 20% of the aquaculture, 89% of dairy and 60% of horticulture PGs. Similar trend exists in other domains: 100% of the Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) and 40% of the vermin compost entrepreneurs are women while their involvement as input shop entrepreneurs, collector and seller entrepreneurs and skilled labour is also on the rise. 43% of the Executive positions of the PGs are occupied by women, a 7% increase from the previous year. By addressing the challenges faced by women in production and entrepreneurship activities and streamlining the service delivery mechanisms, SaFaL has enhanced their access to critical services and resources. From technology adoption to entrepreneurship development, from capacity building to innovation, SaFaL’s initiatives have created an environment where women could freely take part in a whole range of agriculture and livelihood activities, exercise greater control over income and resources and play a proactive role in decision making at various levels.

SaFaL LEAD FARMER EARNs RECOGNITION FOR HER LEADERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Tapati Mandal (47), the Lead Farmer of 'Shenerber Vegetable Producer Group' and 'Shahidkhali Vegetable Producer Group' of SaFaL in Paikgacha Upazilla in Khulna district, has gained recognition from the government for her contribution in women empowerment and agricultural development. She has received the Joyeeta (meaning “Winner”) award in the 'economic self-reliance' category from the Ministry of Women and Children's Affair of Bangladesh Government. A natural leader, Tapati joined SaFaL as a Lead Farmer in 2014 and participated in a number of training programmes on sustainable agriculture, crop protection, disaster management, integrated pest management, vermin compost production, etc. Through lobbying, counseling and demonstration, she was able to motivate the PG members and the general farmers to pursue their agricultural activities in a systematic way, use organic pesticides and fertilizers, apply SaFaL-promoted technologies like Pheromone Trap and herbal supplements. She also succeeded in diversifying and enhancing her own vegetable production and earned good profit. In September 2014, Tapati was nominated by SaFaL to attendan exposure visit organised by SATNET Asia and gained a wealth of knowledge on new and innovative farming practices. Tapati is now able to give her children good education and raise the prospects for a better future for them. She feels that, economic self-reliance is the key not only for women empowerment but also for the development of the whole nation.
300 PGs Adapted Dairy Development Wheel For Continuous Improvement In Milk Productivity

The Dairy Development Wheel (DDW), a comprehensive participatory dairy development tool focusing on key factors of dairy development, has been adapted and introduced to the SaFaL dairy producer groups with support from two Dutch organizations: KoningBoer and Dutch Farm Experiences. The successful piloting of the DDW with 10 SaFaL PGs has resulted in a firm conviction among the Dairy PGs about its potential. One of the key outcomes of the pilot is the reduction of common disease incidence among cattle by as much as 83.57%. The other significant outcomes included reduction of parasite infestation (80.91%), improvement of housing condition (80.10%), improvement of breeding situation (88.64%), improvement of feeding status (57.37%) and the improvement of concentrate and mineral feeding (66.55%). The success of the piloting has led to the introduction of the DDW to 300 Dairy PGs. This has also raised critical consciousness among the PG members about Green Farming, leading to behavioural changes in the communities for the sustainable management of dairy farming.

Hydroponic Fodder Promises a Wave of Change for Livestock Productivity

SaFaL has successfully piloted Hydroponic fodder production, which has been proved to be a low-cost and resource efficient technology for improving the productivity of livestock. This fact has also been substantiated by a research commissioned by Solidaridad SaFaL project, which was carried out by ICF, Bangladesh Agriculture University, Mymensingh. The fodder can be grown in farmers’ backyard or in a very small area all the year round, has a short production cycle (around 9 days), could be grown as per daily requirements and is an easy-to-adopt technology especially suited for women. Since it is grown inside the homestead in a controlled system (in sheds, which could be built and maintained easily) that ensures quality of feed, women could be engaged in production while performing their daily household activities. Research showed that, regular intake of hydroponic fodders improves the health condition of livestock (it has natural proteins, vitamins, mineral and other nutrients and stimulates immune response), with good potentials of increased milk production. The successful piloting of hydroponic fodder production has inspired a large number of people, including women, to initiate hydroponic fodder production at their homesteads.
SaFaL's five Milk Collection Centres (MCC), established in collaboration with BRAC Dairy, have provided the 'missing-link' in the rural milk supply chain. By leveraging its investment in the post-harvest supply chain, the private sector has been able to directly engage with the local level producers, who have found a way to effectively access the national supply chain, with assurance of fair weight and market competitive price. The MCCs have “digital milk analysers”, which produce quick and accurate reports on the fat percentage and the weight of milk. Owing to the MCCs, the smallholders, especially women, no longer have to worry about unsold milk, unfair price and unreliable vendors. In addition to providing women with direct link to the market, the MCCs have also given them control over income to invest in household well-being and an improved status at the household and in the community.

SaFaL Entrepreneurs Achieve Business Success While Providing Inputs at the Doorsteps of Community People

Mithu Rani, one of the local level service providers developed by SaFaL, has earned fame in the vicinity as a reliable seller of dairy inputs. Mithu Rani, who is also serving as the Lead farmer of Ramnagar Char Uttarpura and Ramnagar Char Madhyapara Milk Producer Groups in Ramnagar Char village, Narail Sadar Upazila, Narail, decided to start her business of ready-feed after taking part in a one-month trial on ready-feed conducted by SaFaL in cooperation with ‘ACi-Godrej, a dairy feed manufacturing firm. She launched her business on 20 August 2015 with an initial investment of BDT 12,000. Now, she has established herself as a reliable vendor of ready-feed, Minamix salt and DCP (Dicalcium Phosphate). Most of the local dairy farmers buy inputs from her. They appreciate her hard work and cooperative attitude and her readiness to help people with valuable information and advice. Mithu Rani has proved her worth both as a Lead farmer and an entrepreneur. She keeps detailed account of her expenditure and profit, runs the business according to a business plan and make sure that her clients do not have to waste any time getting their required products. An enterprising woman, she has cultivated Jumbo fodder and Alfalfa in 20 decimals of fallow land near her homestead, which meets the demands of her cattle. She is saving money for expanding her business, because she feels that the prospect of the business is really bright.
SaFaL CNVs are Providing Critical Services to Improve Health and Nutrition

By providing timely, need-based services to the rural people, The Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) developed by SaFaL have solidified their positions in the rural community. CNVs, each of whom serves several adjoining villages and make door-to-door visits, are providing basic healthcare (e.g. checking of blood pressure and blood sugar) along with counseling and information services on health, nutrition and food consumption behaviour. By working in close collaboration with the SaFaL PGs, the CNVs have been able to extend their network in remote and far-flung areas. “SaFaL Nutrition, Gender and Power Dynamic Study-2015” shows that, around 80% households reported positive changes in their health and nutrition status in the areas covered by the CNVs, which is 20% higher than those not served by the CNVs. The CNVs have also been contributing in household level dietary diversity and reducing the prevalence of illness and malnutrition among children. Their linkage with government health complexes through internship programme has enhanced their knowledge and skills towards winning confidence of the community people. Some CNVs have been able to diversify their income in innovative ways like assisting physicians in their chambers and making regular home visits for providing health services.

SaFaL Shrimp Service Centre Serving the Farmers to Adopt Good Aquaculture Practices

The SaFaL Shrimp Service Centre (SSSC), launched by 13 Lead Farmers of SaFaL in Debhata, Satkhira, is successfully continuing its operation by providing vital services to the shrimp farming communities. The Centre, situated in an easily accessible location, sells branded Probiotics, tea seed cakes, nursery feeds and other key ingredients, thereby acting as a one-stop service centre for aquaculture farmers. Hundreds of farmers have been benefited from this centre, which is being operated by the Lead Farmers to provide extension service to the shrimp farmers in their vicinity. One distinguishing feature of the SSSC has been its support for women entrepreneurs, leading to strengthening of their roles in aquaculture supply chain.
The services provided by local level service providers developed by SaFaL are contributing towards improving the overall productivity of agriculture in the rural southwest of the country. SaFaL’s 500 Lead Farmers are not only providing wide ranging services to the farming communities, they are also acting as catalysts of change for environment-friendly and sustainable development of agriculture. The Community Livestock Service Providers (CLSPs) developed by SaFaL are providing counseling and referral support to the dairy communities, in addition to basic services like artificial insemination, de-worming and California Mastitis Test (CMT). SaFaL PG members, who have been developed as local level entrepreneurs, have been ensuring availability of inputs in dairy, horticulture and aquaculture sectors at the doorstep of rural people. Most of these businesses are run by women, which have the potentials of turning into profitable ventures, thereby raising the prospect of sustainable livelihood for these women. A number of PG members have also emerged as enterprise-level producers of vermin compost, who are branding and selling their products in an increasingly growing market. Through linkage creation, capacity building and counseling support, SaFaL has continued to develop local level service providers, who, in their turn, have been rendering valuable services to larger cross-sections of people, contributing to equitable development of the society.

SaFaL Steps up Safe Mango Production and Market Promotion at Domestic and International Markets

SaFaL business model for sustainable production and market promotion of fruits and vegetables is drawing attention of the farmers and sector leaders for responsible farming and sourcing towards increasing the market outreach of safe food.

Through a multi-stakeholder initiative, Solidaridad has developed a business model for building an inclusive supply chain focused on safe production of horticulture products and market access for the smallholders at the domestic and international levels. Contract farming and responsible sourcing mechanisms of fruits and vegetables are being developed through collaborative initiatives with the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and...
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Bangladesh Fruits and Vegetable Allied Product Exporters Association (BFVAPEA). In 2016, through an integrated farmers support mechanism, SaFaL succeeded in supplying sustainably produced mangoes to Italy, Spain, the UK, Germany and the national retail chain.

In June 2016, a national workshop has been organized in Dhaka entitled Pest-free and Safe Fruits and Vegetables Production for Domestic Consumption and Export through Responsible Contract Farming and Market Promotion. The workshop was represented by, among others, Mr. Hedayetullah Al Mamoon, ndc, Senior Secretary, Ministry of Commerce; Mr. Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture; Mr. Mosharraf Hossain, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture; Mr. Md. Hamidur Rahman, Director General, Department of Agricultural Extension; Mr. Shoumen Saha, Director, Plant Quarantine wing, Department of Agricultural Extension; Mr. Laurent Umans, First Secretary, Food Security, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Bangladesh; Mr. Md. Niaz Rahim, Chairman, Rahimafroz Superstores Ltd.; Mr. S. M. Jahangir Hossain, Director, FBCCI and President, BFVAPEA.

At the workshop, the sector leaders commended the efforts undertaken by SNA and its partners for enhancing the scopes and opportunities for sustainable trade in safe fruits and vegetables. They stressed the importance of multilateral cooperation for optimizing the production and marketing of safe fruits and vegetables in domestic and international markets. The workshop participants indicated a strong willingness to collaborate and support farmers for production of safe fruits and vegetables and responsible sourcing.

Solidaridad, with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), is implementing the Sustainable Agriculture, Food Security and Linkages (SaFaL) project in the southwest Bangladesh. SaFaL is supporting 57,000 smallholder farm households, disadvantaged landless workers for adoption of sustainable value chain based farming practice in three sub sectors (livestock, aquaculture and horticulture).

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