Farmer field day is about sharing knowledge, especially farmer-to-farmer. Five field days were organized in September-October 2021 for building awareness among the polder communities on High Yielding Variety (HYV) rice cultivation and terminal drainage to facilitate mechanized harvest and consequently, early establishment of rabi (dry season) crops in the polder zone for sustaining productivity and income.

In total, 666 people participated in the field days in which 40% were women. They consist of farmers, community leaders, school teachers and government officials. The farmers from the Learning Hubs (CFFS farmers) shared their experience in planting climate-resilient and nutritious HYV rice and associated water management for its cultivation in the aman season. They also highlighted the importance and potential benefits of sustainable intensification and diversification by adopting HYV rice in the wet season.
Building capacities for improved farming: breadth and depth

A total of 5412 individuals were trained on different aspects of agriculture, water management, nutrition, and youth and women engagement in agricultural mechanization since the start of the SIIL-Polder Phase II. More than 90% of participants were from the farming community and 31% were women.

The breadth of people reached within the first year of the project is a promising start. The team is continuously improving its training approach and methodologies and asking the questions such as does it contribute to farmers' knowledge, are they instrumental in changing farmers' practices, will the change result in better livelihoods? These questions will help assess the depth of the benefits of these trainings.

Cluster Farmer Field School - a tailored-fit approach

A Cluster Farmer Field School (CFFS) model builds on the concept of the widely adopted Farmer Field School (FFS) in Bangladesh where learning happens on the farm and among the farmers throughout the cropping season. In CFFS, farmers are purposely selected and trained based on their location's hydrological boundary. These boundaries set the limit of water flow in and out of their farms and the CFFS model makes collective action among farmers more feasible. Given the nature of water flows in the polder, a collective action is needed to synchronize water availability with the crop growth. CFFS is being implemented by the SIIL-Polder project and the Department of Agricultural Extension in 23 hectares of land and 92 farmers.
Mapping the complex agro-hydrology in the polders

A good understanding of the polder’s land and water dynamics is very important in the polder zone’s agricultural development. The polder ecosystem of Bangladesh is surrounded by rivers and constantly influenced by the semi-diurnal tidal cycle. The management of water for agriculture needs to consider the characteristics of the peripheral rivers, internal drainage canal network, drainage structures and land elevation inside the polder.

The SIIL-Polder project, through the leadership of the Institute of Water Modelling, started to develop micro watershed and drainage network maps to guide Water Management Groups or WMGs in operating sluice gates that control the flow of water. Mapping is part of the efforts to improve farm productivity in the polders by synchronizing sluice gate operation with the crop growth stages and rainfall/drought events. Managing this complex water-land ecosystem opens many opportunities such as improved cropping, early harvest, avoidance of cyclone seasons, and longer planting windows for other crops after the staple crop rice is harvested.

The outputs from this activity are expected to identify geographical areas suitable for adoption of innovative farming practices for improving food and nutritional security of the polder communities of southern Bangladesh.
Featured photo: Bidhashar, Soha, and Porshi, the little ones who love to tag along with their mothers during the Nutrition training in the polder zone.

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