

Participatory rural video centre in fostering women's voices- A model from Bangladesh

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Introduction

Bangladesh is an agrarian country in South-Asia with 160 million people (BBS 2010). Sustainability of the agricultural system, poverty and food security is of great concern. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) is the leading organization in Bangladesh for promoting the latest agricultural technologies among the farming community in order to ensure sustainable agricultural growth. The New Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) targeting "*Integrated Environmental Support*" was adopted by the DAE. This initiative was taken by DAE to protect against the environmental degradation caused by agro-chemicals used in agriculture. However, total consumption of chemical fertilizers has increased by 30% and consumption of pesticides has doubled in the last two decades (MoA 2009). This indicates that creative and innovative ways to are needed to support farmer to farmer learning.

Although participatory methodologies such as participatory learning and action research (PLAR) and FFS are effective in enabling learning between farmers, testing and modifying technologies, and building social cohesion, scaling out learning outcomes beyond the pilot scale and reaching out to rural poor and women remain a key challenge (Braun et al. 2006).

In Bangladesh women have less influence in decision-making about farming issues and men usually take over the economically viable farming activities (Al-Amin et al. 2004). Staff of agricultural extension services are mainly men, and agricultural development interventions are often male biased (Van den Ban & Samanta 2006; Chowdhury 2010). As a consequence, networks of women are very weak and they have limited access to information, technologies, services, and markets. Local, national and international partners and farmer communities contributed to develop an approach for creative use of videos in stimulating farmer-to-farmer learning. The Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project introduced a video mediated learning approach in combination with participatory learning and action research (PLAR) and FFS to disseminate rice seed production and preservation technologies through women-to-women extension in Bangladesh. Observing this success story of women-to-women extension of PETRRA project in Bangladesh, DAEE and CDR jointly undertook a project of video-mediated learning to enhance household food security of the rural poor and women. Following a normative review of concepts and evidence we described a model of participatory video (PV) supported women farmers' capacity building process for homestead crop and seed production.

Farmers' Learning through Participatory Videos

Video is not a new medium in agricultural extension activities in Bangladesh, however, the idea of participatory video (PV) is new. The use of video has been in the mass media (e.g. TV) and in classroom training material (DAE 1999). According to Huber (1999), "PV refers to a bundle of alternative applications of video technology in development projects. Its goal is to bring about social change. PV has two broad elements, one is the product (the finished tape or disc) and another is the process of developing the product. Mainstream PV practitioners usually (Lunch & Lunch 2006) value the process over the product. Process goal is to enhance capacity of group to articulate their own problems and potentials, using video as the central media (Figure 1).

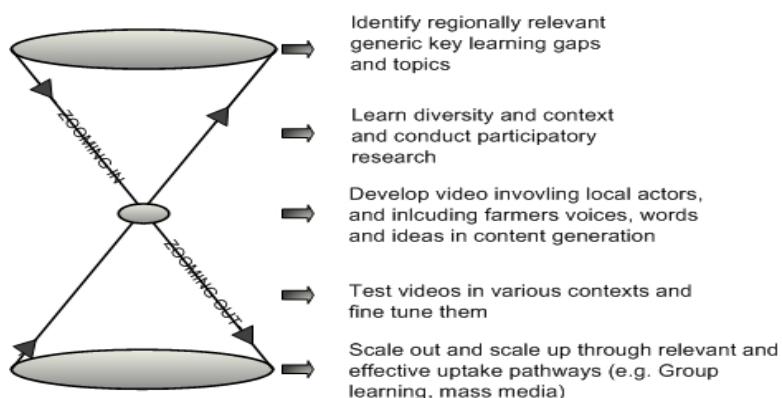
Figure 1. PV process in a nutshell

Development of personal skills of the community and other interested actors to use the technology
 Identification of the facilitators who view their role as that of 'co-learner'
 Improving relations and identifying the development problems through engaging in dialogue with the participants and using participatory tools adapted to the context
 Short video and messages prepared and filmed with and by the participants
 Daily screening of footage with the community
 Adopting a community-led learning, sharing and exchange motion
 Completed films can serve as a basis for awareness and exchange between various different target groups

Source: Lunch & Lunch (2006)

A key element of PV is to involve local farmers in content generation. Farmers and facilitators identify local knowledge and/ or innovations having regional relevance through participatory research activities. Rural men and women play an active role in identifying ideas, principles of technologies and in preparing the script, featuring in the video and validating the final content. As the 'zooming-in' progresses, so starts the 'zooming-out' with the organization of video mediated group learning sessions in multiple villages (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Zooming in zooming out: a new approach for developing video and learning tools to scale out sustainable agricultural innovations



Source: Adapted from: Van Mele, 2006 and Zossou *et al.*, 2009

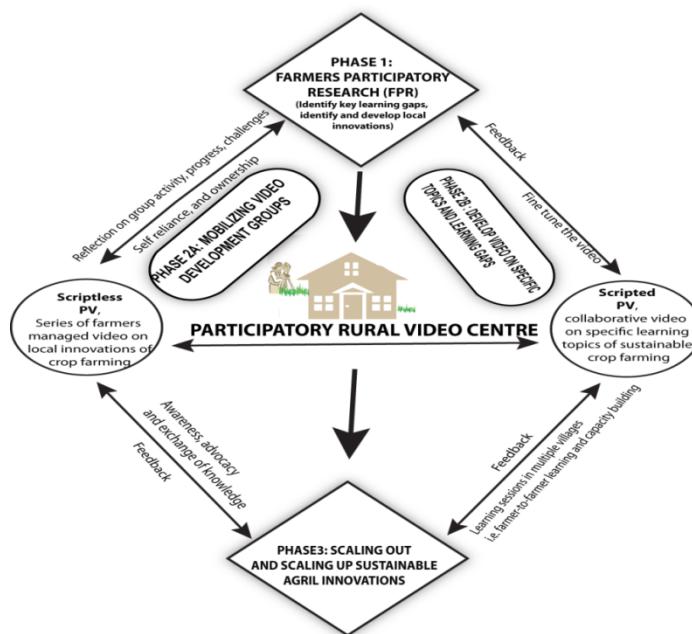
PV centre in fostering women voices: A model of improving capacity

This section describes an action research initiative for enhancing food security by enabling women farmers to learn about homestead-based crop production. The three year project from CDR, was called 'Fostering women voices through videos' (FWVV).

The project has been implemented in the northeast and north-west region of Bangladesh in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Extension Education (DAEE) of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) since 2010. DAEE works with another partner Rural Development Academy (RDA) to implement the project in the north-west. In this project we intend to implement a model (Figure 3). Participatory rural video centre (PV centre) is the backbone of the model. The PV team is to be comprised of at least six members. The PV centre in Kamarpara village, Sajahanpur, Bogra district has been managed by a group of rural men and women since March, 2010.

Factors in selecting members included, gender (half of the members are women), interest in innovation and creativity, close relation and extended network with farming communities in the area, passion for learning, time for voluntary work. In this model we define the team members as the PV team. Although the project focus is on women, findings indicate that both smallholders' men and women become associates of the centre. The household is a unit where bargaining and negotiation takes place between men and women. Therefore, it is necessary to involve (either as in executive committee or as associates) both members. In this model we define associates (men and women farmers in the community) as the PV community.

Figure 3. Model of PV supported women farmers' capacity building approach in Bangladesh



Management structure of the PV centre

The management structure of the PV centre is as follows:

1. *Coordinator*: Coordinates overall activities of the centre, including video, and farmers' participatory research.
2. *Assistant coordinator*: Assists coordinator for performing his/her functions.
3. *Secretary*: Maintains documentation of the activities of the centre, day-to-day book-keeping, and serves communication between the project team and rural community, especially women.
4. *Research manager*: Oversees participatory research activities, assists office secretary to perform his/her functions.
5. *Member*: Helps organizing different activities of the centre and performs responsibilities as assigned.

Major functions of the PV centre

The goal of the PV centre is to have a long-term action plan for the video-mediated women farmers' empowerment process in the community. The PV centre serves as a 'social laboratory' of the project, as a way to plan and implement project activities that enable farmers' innovation capacity in the future. After discussion with the PV team, the project identified the following specific functions of the centre:

- Meeting weekly to discuss progress of activities and share experiences.
- Assist in collection of innovation and farmers' innovative ideas, stories, and experiences.
- Development of proposals for farmers' participatory research, implementation and evaluation of participatory research.
- Collaborate in planning, implementation and validation of learning video managed by the project research team.
- Use of video for fostering women empowerment in rural areas (Implementation of farmers' managed PV, document innovative ideas, or broadcast events through video that may have an impact on women empowerment process at micro level).
- Work as platform for facilitating communication between the community, the project team, and any other potential actors that would stimulate agricultural innovation process.

The process of the capacity building is aligned with farmers' participatory research (FPR) principles. The PV team interacts with fellow farmers (PV community) to understand local innovations and conduct relevant research. For this project we selected three major topics: Organic manure preparation through waste management, Seed processing and post-harvest in homestead and Ecological plant protection practices.

Firstly, we selected three crops: eggplant and leafy vegetables (red amaranth and Indian spinach) for crop and seed production in the homestead, a food production unit within women's

domain of work. PV members have learnt to produce organic eggplant by using their own vermi-compost and botanical pesticide.

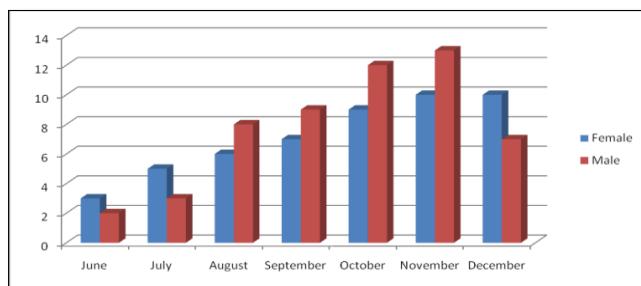
Secondly, it is necessary to understand key learning gaps and solutions in the area of organic manure production. This project concentrates on vermi-compost. The project continues to support this activity and started FPR on composting since its inception in 2010. It is a process of using various species of worms, usually red wrigglers, white worms, and earthworms to create a heterogeneous mixture of compost (Figure 4).

Figure 4. A PV community member working with her vermi-compost pit



According to project objectives PV members are providing consultation for promoting vermi-composting to the community members (Figure 4).

Figure 5. Number of farmers who visited PV centre for information on vermi-composting



Source: Annual progress report 2010

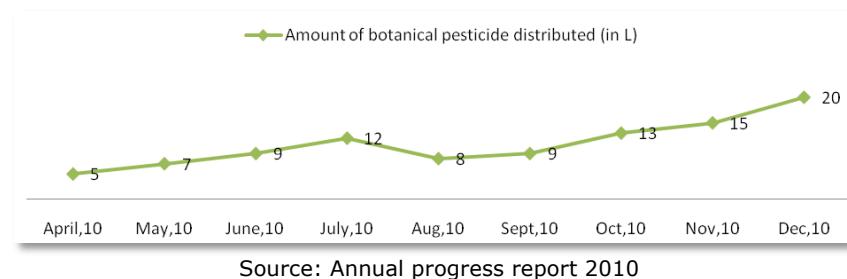
Thirdly, ongoing FPR on botanical pesticide was included as part of the project. The members of PV centre in Kamarapara have been conducting FPR on botanical pesticide.

Farmers' managed FPR, the researchers only intervened to facilitate and understand principles of local innovations. The project target is to enhance women's capacity for local innovations in homestead-based crop and seed production- a pathway to address household food security. As a part of FPR PV members are producing botanical pesticide from locally available plant materials (Figure 6).

Figure 6. PV members are producing botanical pesticides



PV members usually use this botanical pesticide to protect their crops (especially vegetables) from insect and disease pests. After producing additional amounts of botanical pesticide they sell the excess to other community members. PV members of Kamarapara produced 180 liters of botanical pesticide in 2010. After use in their own crop fields they have sold about 98 liters of pesticide to other community members (Figure 7). As the learning gaps are identified and key solutions are known, the next phase is to develop audio-visual learning material.

Figure 7. Amount of botanical pesticide distributed among community members

Source: Annual progress report 2010

We will follow a scripted style (as in case of ZIZO) to develop the video for enabling farmers' learning beyond the pilot village i.e. where the PV-centre is located. We plan to organize 14 women's groups in 2-3 districts both in the north-east and north-west to produce these videos. When scripted PV, will form the basis of farmer-to-farmer learning, while, a few scriptless videos will be developed by the PV members to build awareness and advocacy for and within PV community. It is important to develop a regional and local scaling out and scaling up strategy in addition to project facilitated farmer-to-farmer learning in selected areas. One way it can be done is by identifying potential actors and organizations that have an interest in incorporating the learning materials in their programmes.

Figure 8. PV team members are learning about PV development

In the final stage of the project we intend to accomplish the scaling out and scaling up tasks by conducting research and verifying hypotheses developed on potentials of script less and scripted videos.

Conclusions

The importance of agricultural extension to eliminate poverty, vulnerability and hunger cannot be overemphasized. Along with other extension methods, participatory video can contribute significantly in maintaining sustainability of agricultural systems as well as empowering PV members. From our study we argue that PV has untapped potential to enhance farmers' innovation and creativity. This can contribute to increase household food production and utilization. We expect that this model will contribute towards achieving a food secure rural Bangladesh. To ensure this happens we need to be inventive at both the personal and organizational levels of partnerships.

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