

MID-TERM EVALUATION
of the
Special Programme for Food Security (Bangladesh)
(GCSP/BGD/033/JPN)

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ACRONYMS

AEZ	Agro-ecological zone
ASIRP	Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (World Bank)
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DG	Director General
ESAF	Food Security Service (FAO)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFS	Farmer field school
FGDP	Farmer Group Development Plan
GDP	Gross domestic product
GO	Governmental organisation
LoA	Letter of Agreement
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPD	National Project Director
NSC	National Steering Committee
PMU	Project Management Unit
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
RFS	Revolving fund system
SPFS	Special Programme for Food Security
SSC	South-south cooperation
TAPP	Technical Assistance Project Performance report
TCOS	SPFS Monitoring and Coordination Service (FAO)
TCP	Technical Cooperation Programme
TL	Team Leader
UAECC	Upazila Agricultural Extension Coordinating Committee
UAO	Upazila Agricultural Officer
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
UTF	Unilateral Trust Fund
VBO	Village-based organisation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This Evaluation Report presents the main findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation, conducted 23 May to 2 June 2005, for the project “Special Programme for Food Security (GCSP/BGD/033/JPN),” representing the extension of the pilot phase of SPFS in Bangladesh. The USD 3.3m project, funded by the Government of Japan and executed by FAO, commenced in July 2002 and is programmed to be completed in June 2007. It is one of four country programmes (including also Laos, Sri Lanka and Indonesia) funded by Japan with overall coordination by a Regional Coordinator based in Jakarta. The mission visited six (of 21) project villages and met with officials at various levels in Dhaka, including the Hon. Minister.
2. The project is proposed by FAO to be the pilot step in building a national food security programme, based on the wide replication of the model piloted under this project, which seeks to develop and demonstrate a viable, low-cost, effective and easily replicable approach to achieve household food security. It is implemented by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).
3. The Development Objective of this SPFS pilot project is in line with the overall SPFS programme, which seeks to achieve impact on reducing food insecurity at national level in the countries where it is active. But there is an important design weakness at this level of the document: it goes directly from this Development Objective to its Immediate Objectives concerned with implementation of community level interventions. This has led the project to focus at the wrong level in implementation. If the SPFS is to have a positive impact on household food security among the very poor on a national scale, it follows logically that the *main* objective of an SPFS pilot project like this one is to develop a model for replication on a very large scale. Assisting the immediate beneficiaries at village level (a mere 21 of the country's 86,000 villages) is the means through which the model is being developed.
4. However, the project document does not state this clearly at any point, indicating instead that the project is an end in itself, and its success will be measured by sustainably improving the livelihoods of its tiny number of immediate beneficiaries. While this is a necessary condition of success (the model cannot be viable without), it is certainly not a sufficient condition - the project must produce a model (methodology or process) which is taken up for replication, without which it will be unsuccessful.
5. Project management is under a project-funded Project Management Unit normally headed by a Team Leader, but this post has been vacant for the past year. It includes a Deputy Team Leader, 5 subject matter experts who also act as Zonal Coordinators, and with counterpart funds, a National Project Director (NPD) and his assistant. The project should have the services of a Japanese Technical Adviser but this post has also been vacant for over a year. The project has a National Steering Committee (NSC) chaired by the Secretary, MOA.
6. After some initial delay, project disbursement is moving well, but it is expected there will be significant funds remaining at the currently planned termination date (July 2007). The MTE recommends that these funds be used for a one-year extension. There was an issue regarding the use of petty cash advances for project operations, whereby employees of FAO (project staff) take cash advances on their own salaries for use in paying project expenses. The mission feels strongly that this situation (not only on this project) is completely unacceptable, and encourages FAO to accelerate the process of policy change to remedy it.

7. Overall, implementation has been moving forward quite rapidly over the past year. Direct beneficiaries both at village level and in collaborating GOs and NGOs were benefiting quite substantially from project activities, at least in the sites visited by this mission.

8. The mission noted the very intensive level of training, support, monitoring, supervision, backstopping and follow-up from the PMU, contracted NGOs and local MOA staff. Under these circumstances, project interventions seemed to work well, to be having a positive impact on villagers' lives and to contribute to village development in the project villages. Training has also been an important part of the project's activities and appeared to be producing good results, as demonstrated by levels of knowledge of farmers, VBO executive committee members, local DAE staff (block supervisors) and NGO staff met in the villages. Regarding the use of the "Farmer Field School" (FFS) methodology, however, it appeared that there was some misunderstanding about the approach on this project. The mission has recommended direct support from FAO in learning and using the FFS methodology.

9. The mission was unsure of the sustainability of the "FGDP" (Farmer Group Development Plans) and the "RFS" (Revolving Fund System), tools applied with some success at other sites under the Regional SPFS Programme. The FGDP process is somewhat complex and cumbersome, and it seems possible that this system would be dropped following withdrawal of project support. The RFS also raises issues regarding the possibility of maintaining a viable village-managed fund following the end of the project. These concerns are reflected in the project's own analysis of the limits of the RFS. Both FGDP and RFS benefit from very close support, monitoring, supervision and training by the NGOs, the District and Upazila technical staff, and project staff, raising two questions: can FGDPs and RFSs sustain themselves following withdrawal of project support? And, can their success can be reproduced under non-project conditions, with only government resources?

Main Conclusions and Issues

10. The MTE mission identified a number of issues with project conception and implementation, which are not provided as criticism but are meant to serve a learning process through which to improve project implementation in order to achieve its objectives with the time and resources which it has at its disposal.

11. The first and most important issue concerns the weakness in project formulation which has led the project to focus at the wrong level in implementation. Rather than focussing on the village and the farmer to judge progress toward achieving objectives, the project should focus on the higher goal of **developing the workable, low-cost and effective model** for replication. This will need to include consideration of the costs of maintenance of early sites when moving to new ones. The project should also be more explicitly targeting government and NGO staff as they constitute a key element of the model being developed. Also, based on the current work, the project will need to consider whether it is likely that the DAE will take the initiative to engage NGOs for local social mobilisation, not to mention technology advice, or possibly whether the DAE will be able to carry out these functions themselves.

12. Regarding **targeting of beneficiaries**, the MTE mission supports the targeting approach adopted by the project, i.e., community-level targeting, as it is more likely that benefits will effectively reach the most disadvantaged if the rest of the village is involved. Regarding **sustainability of project approaches**, this is yet to be demonstrated *without PMU*. This point leads to the recommendation (below) for phased withdrawal from project villages starting as soon as possible. Regarding the **menu of interventions offered to participating villages**, the mission notes the importance of working in different AEZs in order to find locally adapted

models of intervention to reduce food insecurity. At present the approach seems to be more or less the same in all project locations, with superficial variations. The mission feels it is important to develop flexible and location-specific approaches, experimenting with development of the most beneficial, cost effective and locally adapted package or combination of interventions.

13. With regard to **South-South Cooperation**, overall based on observations, review of documents and discussions the mission must concur with the finding of the Consultative Review that the language, approach and cultural barriers separating the Chinese technicians from the local context are too strong to judge this a successful or, especially, a cost-effective component. The mission notes, however, that this sort of collaboration does have great value as a political and public relations initiative for the developing countries involved. Regarding the **need to interact with related FAO initiatives**, the mission feels there is much room for more intensive exchange with other similar projects, through, for example, the use of trained trainers from one project to train staff or farmers on the others, etc. In the particular case of the Food Policy project being initiated between FAO and the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, the mission strongly encourages the project, as well as its home unit in FAO Headquarters (TCOS), to actively pursue involvement in this large (\$11m) EU and USAID funded programme.

Recommendations

14. The MTE mission **recommends** a budget revision to **extend the project closing date at least to June 2008** with leftover funds.

15. It is **strongly recommended** that the SPFS project develop a systematic **trial "exit strategy" from the more 'advanced' communities** in order to test sustainability of the project interventions before the end of this project. Full withdrawal from the first of these communities (not less than three) should be completed **not later than July 2006**. Following withdrawal, a system would be set up for the project to periodically and unobtrusively **monitor the communities** to see and understand the strengths and weaknesses of VBO and FGDP groups without direct support.

16. In parallel with the sustainability testing, the mission again **strongly recommends** that the project **extend the experience** gained in the first 21 villages to new **test villages**, to apply experience gained so far and especially, allow testing and refining of the **streamlining** of intervention start-up and full cycle.

17. As part of both building and selling the SPFS model, the mission **recommends** that the SPFS project **carefully document project processes, experiences and approaches** through guidelines, case studies, lessons from experience, technology manuals, audio-visuals (slide shows, videos, radio shows, etc.), high impact PowerPoint presentations, etc. The project should enlist professional assistance (possibly from inside FAO) to develop a Communication Strategy to maximise impact.

18. As part of the prioritisation criteria for the expansion of SPFS, the mission **recommends** that the PMU should initiate a serious assessment of other similar initiatives going on in the country with a view to avoiding overlap and duplication of efforts in the same physical locations.

19. The report also makes a number of recommendations on specific implementation issues which project management discussed with the MTE mission (para. 103).

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Evaluation Report presents the main findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation for the project “Special Programme for Food Security (GCSP/BGD/033/JPN),” representing the extension of the pilot phase of SPFS in Bangladesh. The USD 3.3m project, funded by the Government of Japan and executed by FAO, commenced in July 2002 and is programmed to be completed in June 2007. It is one of four country programmes funded by Japan with overall coordination by a Regional Coordinator based in Jakarta. The other three countries are Laos, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

2. The MTE was conducted between 23 May and 2 June 2005, which is a bit over mid-way in terms of the overall five-year implementation schedule of the project. The MTE Team was composed of Mr. Daniel Shallon (FAO Evaluation Service, Team Leader), Mr. Okudaira Hiroshi (Japan Ministry of Agriculture), Mr. Mohd. Sher Ali (Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh), Ms. Nasrin Nahar and Mr. Shohelur Rahman Khan (Ministry of Planning) and Mr. Mohd. Mizanul Haq (Ministry of Finance).

3. During the period 23-30 May, the mission visited six (of 21) project villages in five districts of the country,¹ where it met with women and men beneficiaries, NGO staff working with the project, local agricultural staff, and Upazila and District officials. In Dhaka, the Team met with officials at various levels of the Ministry of Agriculture including the Hon. Minister, and had extensive discussions with the project team. Throughout the mission, the team was accompanied by the Regional Coordinator, Mr. Imai Shin, and was also joined during the second week by the desk officer from Rome, Mr. Fintan Scanlan.

II. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

A. National Context

4. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries, with a population of about 135 million living on just 147,570 km² of land (over 900 inhabitants per km²). The country's 14.5 million farmers are limited to about 8 million ha of arable land, meaning that the average farm size is only 0.55 ha. GDP per capita was USD 354 in 2003 (about USD 1500 at purchasing power parity). In terms of the UNDP Human Development Index, the country is ranked 139 out of 175 countries in 2003, close to the bottom of the "medium human development" countries.

5. Recent drops in fertility rates have slowed population growth to below 1.5% per year, a promising sign. Bangladesh has also made impressive gains in food production over the past several decades. Nearly 80% of the cropped area is under rice at least for one season. Annual rice output has more than doubled since the 1960s, to over 25 million tonnes. There has been significant progress in ensuring supplies of rice and wheat so that they are available throughout the seasons and through years of poor harvests, floods, droughts, cyclones and other natural calamities common in Bangladesh. This has avoided the large and sharp price variations that led to food crises and famines in the past. Annual per capita grain availability

¹ Char Gobra in Gopalganj Dist.; Utterpara in Bagherhat Dist.; Talbaria in Jessore Dist.; Rupchang in Sylhet Dist.; and Ashkarpur and Oviram in Rangpur Dist.;

increased from 156.2 kg in 1985-86 to 203.5 kg in 2002-03. Between 1981 and 2000, the percentage of food insecure in the country dropped from 73% to less than 50%.

6. Nonetheless, the country continues to have one of the highest malnutrition rates in the world, with an estimated 45% of Bangladeshis undernourished. Among children and pregnant and nursing mothers, the most vulnerable groups, this figure is 70%. Although there was a decline in the undernourished share of the population from 1995-96 to 2000, the absolute number of food insecure people actually increased. Except for rice, availability and especially access are still problematic for all important foods.

7. The main cause of the food security problem is that around half of population remains below the established poverty line, and more than a quarter of all Bangladeshis (some 35 million people) are considered to be in extreme poverty, suffering from chronic food insecurity. Among these, hunger incidence is highest for the landless (estimated at over 7 million) and those residing in urban slums. The situation is aggravated by the recurrent natural disasters, lop sided entitlements, poor primary health care and generally unsafe drinking water. Gender imbalance is also a striking feature of social indicators - including nutrition - in Bangladesh. Food insecurity in the country is most rampant in case of landless and marginal farmers and poor women, primarily due to the lack of purchasing power and therefore lack of access to food.

8. It is in this context that the Special Programme for Food Security is seeking to develop and demonstrate a viable approach to improving food security on a national scale.

B. Project Background

9. The current project was formulated as follow-up and extension of three smaller SPFS projects which were implemented under the umbrella of the DFID/World Bank funded Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP). These projects were funded in part from FAO's TCP funds (TCP/BGD/8928 and its second phase, TCP/BGD/0167) and in part as small Unilateral Trust Funds (UTFs) with WB funding. They focussed on on-farm water management, soil testing and fertiliser management, and crop yield forecasting and agrometeorology.

10. The terminal report of ASIRP was quite positive about the effects of the technologies being promoted by the FAO projects, noting mainly the increase in irrigation command areas and more efficient use of water, as well as mentioning growing awareness among producers of the value of soil analysis. No mention was made of the costs incurred in obtaining these impacts (about USD 1.5m for all the projects, affecting six villages). Instead, the WB review considers the upcoming Japan-funded project (the present USD 3.3m project) as a way to ensure "sustainability" of this work by extending it to 21 more villages.

11. The project under review is proposed by FAO to be the pilot step in building a national food security programme, based on the wide replication of the model piloted under this SPFS trust fund which seeks to develop and demonstrate a viable, low-cost, effective and easily replicable approach to achieve household food security. It is implemented by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

III. ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT FORMULATION AND DESIGN

A. Project Justification

12. The project document goes into significant detail on context, rationale and justification, and explains quite clearly what the SPFS is seeking to achieve, who it wishes to target, what others and FAO are doing in the country in this domain, and why FAO is the appropriate implementing agency. As noted above, Bangladesh is a country with a particularly serious problem of household food insecurity. In this context, the goal of the SPFS, to increase national food security levels by applying low-cost, innovative and appropriate solutions at the farm level, is highly relevant.

13. The particular approach outlined in the document includes issues of access to services, gender, group formation and participation, income generation, water management, marketing, nutrition, post-harvest loss, credit, and fuel. The project proposes to identify an innovative combination of these elements that should lead to sustainable positive change in the lives of the food insecure.

14. The basis for sustainability of the project's approach to integrated rural development is the creation of viable and durable groups. The document postulates the creation of a large variety of groups in any single community, including groups based on activity, gender, youth, crop or animal, irrigation system, etc. All these groups would come under a "VBO" or Village-Based Organization," and the VBO and the sub-groups would all be supported, trained and supervised by local NGOs.

15. This approach resembles the approaches used by large numbers of other projects and NGO initiatives in Bangladesh and elsewhere. As a general rule in rural development, there are issues with dependence on group durability to ensure sustainability of project-sponsored change, and these issues were quite apparent in the present project. They are discussed below in the section on "Conclusions".

B. Project Objectives and Design

16. The **Development Objective** of this SPFS pilot project stated in the project document is:

to assist to improve national, household/individual food security on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis by rapidly increasing food production and productivity, reducing year to year variation of production and improve access to food as a contribution to equity and poverty alleviation.

17. This statement of the objective of the project is in line with the overall SPFS programme, which seeks to achieve impact on reducing food insecurity at national level in the countries where it is active.

18. There is an important design weakness at this level of the document: it goes directly from this Development Objective to the Immediate Objectives 1-5 listed below. This has led the project to focus at the wrong level in implementation. The SPFS is an FAO-sponsored global effort to reduce hunger and food insecurity. The objective of the SPFS national programmes, of which there are now over 100, is to have **a positive impact on household food security among the very poor on a national scale**.

19. It follows logically that the *main* objective of the SPFS Pilot Projects (of which this is one) is to **develop a model for replication on a very large scale**. The primary objective of the pilot

activities is not to assist the immediate beneficiaries at village level (a mere 21 of the country's 86,000 villages - a drop in an ocean). Assistance to these farmers is the means through which the model is being developed.

20. However, the project document does not state this clearly at any point, neither in the objectives and activities nor in the Project Rationale or Project Strategy sections. Rather, the vision which emerges on close reading is of a project which is an end in itself, aiming to sustainably improve the livelihoods of its tiny number of immediate beneficiaries. Beyond that, it would at best leave behind some lessons learned, some strengthened capacity among DAE staff, and possibly a few technical field manuals.

Immediate objectives

21. The project's five immediate objectives as given in the project document are the following:

- Immediate Objective 1: The communities (rural poor, women and disadvantaged groups) develop self-reliance in diagnosing opportunities and constraints, and testing and implementing practical solutions to achieve sustainable food security.
- Immediate Objective 2: Strengthening institutional capacity all levels (community, local and national level).
- Immediate Objective 3: The production and productivity of rice, wheat, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables of resource poor farmers increased through crop intensification through improved water control and integrated nutrient management with linkage with ASIRP, SPFP and Arsenic project - BGD/99/009.
- Immediate Objective 4: Promote farming system diversification and nutrition and energy conservation awareness, and develop location specific integrated farming systems for rural households, and especially women and vulnerable groups, to enhance production, income generation and availability of nutritious food in order to improve nutritional status.
- Immediate Objective 5: Promote small scale agro-processing, post harvest handling technology and on-farm and off-farm income generating activities through promotion of community based produce handling methods, supported by marketing, credit and other agricultural support services, and identification of constraints.

22. These immediate objectives, again, relate only to the effect of project activities on immediate beneficiaries (producers and government staff). While not very logically organised (there is quite some repetitiveness between them), nor well stated as objectives, each of them is accompanied by three to five "success criteria" which are generally better phrased as objectives than the objectives themselves.²

23. All in all, while in need of improvement from a formulation point of view, these objectives and the associated outputs and activities have done fairly well as a guide for developing the intended integrated approach to empowering the poor to improve their agricultural production, incomes and food security.

24. Immediate Objectives 1 and 2 specifically relate to group formation, social mobilisation and training. The other three objectives refer to the technological interventions, as well as

² For example: "Homestead land becomes more productive...", "Households take up location specific agricultural diversification activities with increased involvement of women", "All [stakeholders] fully understand the goal, objectives and activities of the project", "Over 25% increase in consumption of fish, livestock products...", etc.

credit (#5). Instead the document goes into great detail in making a long listing of specific technologies and activities that are to be applied to beneficiary villages.

25. None of the immediate objectives, outputs or activities, however, relate to the goal of producing a model (or models) for replication on a wide scale. The document indicates that activities should be monitored for progress and impact, and training and extension materials should be produced as needed. One activity is to "publish and distribute a newsletter and other publications about success stories and best practices." But these activities are described as emanations from this project, rather than a step to a wider project or programme. In particular, none of the "Success Criteria" refer to impacts beyond the direct primary beneficiaries at village and institutional level.

C. Project Management Structure

26. As with the other projects under the regional programme, the Bangladesh SPFS project has a separate Project Management Unit (PMU) paid for out of project funds and housed in the building of the Department of Agricultural Extension. The PMU is normally headed by a Team Leader, but this post has been vacant for the past year. It also includes a Deputy Team Leader (currently the acting TL) and five full-time subject matter experts who also act as Zonal Coordinators for the six project zones (one of them covers two zones). Their specialisations are livestock, water management and irrigation, agro-forestry, agro-processing and agronomy. A national consultant in fisheries was also present at the time of this mission's visit, and efforts are being made to recruit him as a sixth specialist/zonal coordinator.

27. As PMU staff are not government staff, the project also has a National Project Director (NPD) from the DAE as well as a crops specialist who acts as his assistant. In addition, it was foreseen that the project would have the services of a Japanese Technical Adviser paid for out of the regional coordination project. This post has been vacant for over a year due to difficulties in obtaining government clearance for a replacement.

28. The project has a National Steering Committee (NSC), chaired by the Secretary, MOA. The NSC is meant to meet at least twice yearly and is intended to provide overall guidance to the project. The Committee, which has actually met only once a year for the past three years, includes the DG of the DAE, the Joint Secretary (Extension) and Joint Chief (Planning), as well as representatives from the Ministries of Finance, Food, Fisheries and Livestock, and Forests and Environment, from the Planning Commission, from the Embassy of Japan, from partner NGOs, from FAO, and occasionally from other development agencies. Minutes from the NSC meetings and include recommendations and follow up on previous recommendations.

29. The project also receives technical support from the Regional Co-ordinator of the Japanese-funded SPFS projects, based in Jakarta and funded under GCP/RAS/180/JPN. In addition to this one, the Regional Co-ordinator supports projects in Sri Lanka, Lao PDR and Indonesia.

30. All nine of the PMU officers are presently based in Dhaka. The Zonal Coordinators were originally based in their zones of responsibility, but following discussion at the project's first National Steering Committee meeting in July 2003, they were transferred to Dhaka in order to better share their individual technical specialties across the different project zones. However, the MTE mission was told that the latest decision is to move them once more out to be based in the districts.

31. At Upazila level, the project has established Upazila Agricultural Extension Coordinating Committees (UAECC) to help coordinate the work of the staff of the DAE and other

departments and ministries at Upazila level, the NGOs and the project staff. The Village Based Organisations (VBOs) in that Upazila also have representatives on the UAECC. The mission was not able to see a UAECC in action, but they are reported to contribute significantly to coordination and information at the field level.

IV. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

A. Project Budget and Expenditure

32. The total project budget (excluding FAO overhead charges) for five years is USD 3.355m, of which USD 389,000 of in-kind government contribution. From the beginning of project operations (July 2002) until end-April 2005, the project expenditure amounted to USD 1.7m, or 53% of the total budget, at 55% of the implementation time. Actual plan was for expenditure at this point to have reached over 70%, however, as the greatest expenditure was in the first two years. Thus expenditure is somewhat behind schedule, mainly due to a slow start and implementation difficulties during the first year. Government in-kind contribution for this period has amounted to USD 143,000, or 37% of its share.

33. Project activities are scheduled to slow considerably during the last year of implementation (only 8% of the budget is allocated to that year), and an estimation prepared by the PMU at MTE time found that the project can expect savings of as much as USD 750,000 at the end of the project. As recommended below, this mission believes that these savings should be used for a budget-neutral extension to the project of at least one year, and possibly more if funds are sufficient. In view of the significant change of course being recommended by this mission, the extra time will be of great use to the project.

34. One serious issue regarding the finances of the project was brought to the attention of the MTE mission, regarding the use of petty cash advances for project operations in lieu of a workable system of operational cash advances for implementation in situations where advance planning is difficult for any number of reasons.³ Under the current regime, it is the employees of FAO, i.e. the project staff, who are asked to take cash advances on their own salaries, and use them for the project, getting reimbursed only after presenting receipts, etc. This is a highly irregular situation, which however exists in a number of other FAO projects. The MTE mission was told that solutions are being sought in Rome (through a change in the rules), but the process is taking years to work its way through the system. **The MTE mission feels strongly that this is a completely unacceptable situation**, as individual staff members are being asked, as a matter of normal business since the project began, to take on themselves the risk of borrowing money for project activities. FAO senior management is strongly encouraged to accelerate the process of policy change as much as possible.

³ This is the case for the present project in Bangladesh because of its structure, working through the MOA's DAE as national counterpart, and the centralised organisation of government services in the country which makes it impossible to establish Letters of Agreement or other contractual mechanisms with decentralised government entities in the field. There is also no international CTA who could take responsibility for an imprest account, and because of the iterative nature of planning for this project, many purchase or expenditure decisions need to be made at the last minute, and in several small pieces.

B. Assessment of Project Implementation

Overview

35. The project takes an integrated rural development approach targeting the landless and the marginal and small farmer with technological as well as social mobilisation interventions which include:

- production intensification and increased output (e.g., irrigation, composting, better management of existing production - e.g. fruit trees)
- diversification of production and consumption (e.g., livestock, fisheries, horticulture, agroforestry)
- income generation with agro-processing or non-agricultural activities (e.g., preserves, basket making, sewing)
- savings and credit fund management
- group formation and management
- empowerment of women and nutrition education

36. This wide range of activities is geared to help alleviate food insecurity through increased and more varied production, as well as through improved access to food for the poor through group action, production for sale, income generating activities and access to credit through a group-managed revolving fund system (RFS). Group investment activities are organised around a project planning tool called "Farmer Group Development Plans" (FGDPs). The project aims to demonstrate an approach to achieving self-reliance, leading to self-sustaining household and community development.

37. The project currently targets 4139 direct beneficiaries in 21 villages in an equal number of Upazilas around the country, in 16 districts and covering nine different agro-ecological zones (AEZs). The major criteria use when selecting the villages as project sites were as follows:

- a. The village represents the agro-ecological situation of the concerned Upazila
- b. It represents food insecure area
- c. It contains all categories of farmers
- d. Existence of both irrigated and rainfed areas
- e. Scope for the implementation of all components of SPFS projects.

38. All of the activities listed in para. 35 are being implemented in each of the villages, with very minor differences in terms of type of livestock, type of crop, nature of income-generating activities, etc. No systematic effort appears to have been made to develop packages or combinations of technologies (and social mobilisation) specifically appropriate to the different AEZs, even though this was the point of choosing such far-flung project sites (see section 5D below).

39. One NGO per village is contracted to carry out the social mobilisation activities field level, including initial PRAs and the formation of village-based organizations (VBOs). These 21 local NGOs train villagers in group formation and management, assist in setting up micro-finance services in the form of revolving funds, and act as liaison with government services and formal institutions like banks. Two other NGO partners provide inputs respectively in the form of small scale appropriate irrigation technologies and through provision of 'training of trainer' services.

40. The project also undertakes training of various government staff from the DAE at local, district and national levels, as well as providing training to the NGOs. At District and Upazila

levels, the project endeavours to strengthen linkages among government staff from various sectors, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock and social services. The project also provides a number of overseas study tours for various stakeholders, from poor producers to central government staff, mostly visiting other countries under the same regional umbrella project.

41. The project includes a "South-South Cooperation" component deriving from a tripartite agreement signed by Bangladesh, China and FAO. At mission time, there were 15 Chinese technicians, 5 interpreters and one supervisor in the country, divided into five regional teams of three technicians and one interpreter. The teams reside in the project areas, while the supervisor is in the project management office in Dhaka.

Field Activities and Results

42. A rather complete list of outputs was reviewed during the Consultative Review, and updates have been presented in each of the project's six-monthly progress reports. In addition, the MTE mission was provided with well-prepared and quite thorough project activity and progress reports from each of the different project zones. Only one of these, however, provided some limited (and not quantified) information on outcomes or impact so far. The rest are more concerned with illustrating the baseline situation and preparation of development plans.

43. This Mid-Term Evaluation did not exhaustively review the status of implementation of each type of technical intervention being implemented in the 21 villages. It did not have the time nor the specialised technical skills on board to do so productively, and in any case its objective was rather to focus on larger issues regarding the general direction and future prospects of this SPFS pilot project. It did however visit six field sites and review a sample of field activities to catch any points of particular issue. Comments on some of the outputs are in the 'Conclusions' section below.

44. Overall, the project has been moving forward quite rapidly with implementation over the past year - a comment heard from many of the MTE interviewees. It was clear that the direct beneficiaries both at village level and in collaborating institutions were benefiting quite substantially from project activities, at least in the sites visited by this mission.

45. During its field visits, which happened to fall in between cropping seasons, the mission was able to see many mainly non-crop project activities. The range of activities, as mentioned, was quite wide, including among others livestock activities (beef and dairy cattle, poultry, goats, sheep), tractor purchase, fruit tree nurseries, spice and vegetable cultivation, nutrition activities, making of preserves, sewing groups, basket making, etc. The mission met with VBO group leaders and saw presentations by the male and female group leaders. The level of involvement and enthusiasm was quite high among the villagers met, though the very festive and ceremonial VIP receptions reserved for the team made it difficult to assess the situation as it would be under more 'normal' circumstances.

46. Upazila and Block DAE staff were also found to be quite involved and knowledgeable about the project activities, having clearly been closely involved in implementation. District level staff were less closely involved, as is normal, but even they were found to be knowledgeable and supportive.

47. Project interventions have benefited from a very intensive level of training, support, monitoring, supervision, backstopping and follow-up from the PMU, contracted NGOs and

local MOA staff. The mission observes that while the integrated production and socio-economic mobilisation activities of the project in themselves are not new (as already noted, similar integrated rural development interventions have existed in Bangladesh and elsewhere for many years), judging from villagers' response and involvement of officials concerned, this particular combination of components and intensive technical support seemed to work well, to be having a positive impact on villagers' lives and to contribute to village development in the project villages.

Training of Farmers and Government Staff

48. Workshops and training activities have been an important part of the project's activities. Overall the project reports that it has carried out some 87 training workshops at various levels (74 of them at District and Upazila levels), as well as 12 training-of-trainer workshops. Farmer training has included 231 'seasonal training' activities and 232 'farmer field school' activities, with a total number of attendances of 23,453. Another 119 'farmer field schools' sessions are being prepared. Some 23 people, both farmers and government staff, have benefited from overseas study tours to other countries in Asia with ongoing SPFS activities.

49. Training activities appeared to be producing good results, as demonstrated by levels of knowledge of farmers, VBO executive committee members, local DAE staff (block supervisors) and NGO staff met in the villages. In one case, an overseas study tour of a woman group leader to Sri Lanka had empowered her to take a much more assertive attitude in her interaction with the MTE mission on their visit to her village, leaving a very positive impression on the visitors.

50. One comment, however, relates to the use of the "Farmer Field School" (FFS) methodology. From two examples of ongoing training sessions seen in the field by the mission and consequent discussion with the PMU, it is clear that what this project intends by "farmer field schools" - basically training sessions which take place outdoors and use farmers' fields to demonstrate recommended technologies - is quite different from the methodology being promoted by FAO's Plant Protection Service (which originated the methodology in the context of its work in Integrated Pest Management) and SPFS Monitoring and Coordination Service (which is promoting the adoption of this methodology across all SPFS projects). The genuine FFS methodology is more about empowering producers than simply about transferring a technology or skill, and it has proven itself to be a very powerful complement to SPFS activities in support of food security. **The mission recommends that the project request direct support from FAO in learning and using the FFS methodology.**

51. The training and capacity building activities of the project, though they go beyond the work on developing the best model for upscaling as recommended below, are an important contribution which this project is making and should continue to make. The training work also feeds into the model development and certainly will help with implementation of an expansion of SPFS activities, especially through training of higher level government staff at district and central levels.

Project Implementation Approach: Issues with the FGDP and the RFS

52. Following a visit by the Regional Coordinator to the project in 2004, the Coordinator's two tools for integrated rural development were adopted by the programme in place of its demonstration based approach. These tools are the "FGDP" (Farmer Group Development

Plans) and the "RFS" (Revolving Fund System). The tools had been applied with some success at other sites under the Regional SPFS Programme.

53. They are fairly straightforward village development approaches, involving group formation at village level for the FGDP, with small sub-groups according to activity, gender, etc. The groups then use the FGDP as a planning tool, going through a process of analysis including financial rate of return, environmental impact, institutional arrangements, and development of a log-frame.

54. The process is somewhat complex, involving acquisition of concepts not only of accounting but also of economic analysis, planning and logframe formulation, environmental impact analysis, and of course all the technology package concerned. It appeared to the mission that this model may suffer from limited sustainability: the exercise is done for activities where profit is measured in the few USD cents per day (such as the fishpond examples given, which would have a return of USD 20-50 per year per family, without having factored in the opportunity cost of the land, time and labour invested). It seems possible that this cumbersome analytical system would be dropped following withdrawal of project support.

55. The RFS is a simple interest-free revolving fund with the obligation to save one tenth of profits in a personal sub-account of the village (VBO) account. Many of the transactions are done in kind, for example in the case of rotating females for the livestock activities, where a group member keeps the offspring of the female then passes her on to another group member. Some of the groups visited have accumulated significant amounts of savings in their revolving funds (USD 1000-2000) over the space of one and a half to two years. Money is managed by the NGOs (and in a small number of cases by the DAE officer), as the villagers cannot open a bank account in the name of the project group. VBO leaders and officers get training in financial management and account keeping, and the NGO staff check the books weekly.

56. Here again, however, there are issues regarding the possibility of maintaining a viable village-managed fund following the end of the project. Experience from Bangladesh and many other countries indicates that such project-constituted revolving funds rarely last beyond the end of the project, for many reasons. If they are not based on a solid existing tradition and system of shared savings and loans, it is very difficult to create the confidence and trust, or the guarantees, needed for a group of people to entrust its savings to one of the group. This is even more the case where loans are made without interest and there is no incentive for the group leader to shoulder that responsibility. In addition, these VBO funds are not legally recognised by the bank as belonging to the groups, since the groups are not legally constituted.

57. These concerns are reflected in the project's own analysis of the limits of the RFS, in which it notes that the concept may not be easily accepted, as rural people still often prefer going to known sources of credit (NGOs, money lenders, shopkeepers) where rules are simpler and more practical, and guarantee is given by more formal relations separating the people on both sides of the transaction. There is a lack of trust of VBO leaders to manage others' money, and recognition that they have inadequate skills to do this properly.

58. Both the FGDP process and the RFS management benefit from very close support, monitoring, supervision and training by the NGOs, the District and Upazila technical staff, and project staff. The project villages are visited several times a week by different members of this backup team, foremost among them NGO staff, who are generally in the villages several days each week. Technical staff visit project villages at least once a fortnight, and PMU staff travel to villages several times each month.

59. While the FGDPs and the RFSs appeared to be working well in the villages visited, it was not clear to the mission which characteristics of these approaches particularly distinguish them from many other initiatives ongoing in Bangladesh under other donor-funded projects, NGO activities and government programmes. Their major distinguishing characteristic appeared to be the amount of supervision and backstopping they benefit from. The project team and GO and NGO partners were found to be committed, enthusiastic and highly active, and this gives these approaches their dynamism.

60. The two key issues remaining to address are (a) whether FGDPs and RFSs have likelihood of sustaining themselves following withdrawal of project support, and (b) whether their success can be reproduced under non-project conditions, with a lower level of funding, and in particular, with only government resources.

C. Project Management

61. The MTE mission was quite impressed with the recent achievements under the committed, technically competent and now well-led Project Management Unit (PMU). The mission learned of past problems with PMU management, but found that under the existing arrangements the PMU appeared to work harmoniously and effectively, as well as being well accepted within the DAE where it is located. This situation has apparently genuinely rehabilitated a project which had come to be seen as a 'problem project' but is now seen as an increasingly active and successful one. The issue of the vacant post for Team Leader is an important one, as this person, when named, will have a key role in project implementation. Over the past year, the duties of this post have been carried out highly effectively by the Deputy Team Leader, who is well counter-balanced by an effective NPD. This MTE mission **highly recommends considering promotion of the Deputy TL to the Team Leader position**, based on the proven quality of his work in that role.

62. Backstopping and support from FAO Headquarters, Regional Office, and Regional Coordinator was reportedly of high quality (often cited during field visits) and of sufficient intensity. In addition to the 10 visits of the Regional Coordinator, the project has had nine visits from FAO Headquarters and Regional Office experts to provide technical backstopping in food security, irrigation, gender, credit and finance, post-harvest processing, soil fertility, and nutrition. Following early implementation problems, the project also underwent a Consultative Review in October 2003, which was led by a retired Regional Representative of FAO and included participation of the donor.

63. The project has lately enjoyed a growing visibility at higher levels of the Ministry of Agriculture, including clear support expressed to the mission by the Director General, DAE and the Secretary of the MOA. The Joint Secretary, Extension, and HE the Minister himself have visited or planned to visit the project sites, demonstrating interest in this project and the SPFS programme. HE the Ambassador of Japan expressed strong support for the project following a field visit to project sites in Bandarban. HE the Minister, however, stated clearly when met by this mission that he pragmatically questions the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of such projects, until they are proven to him by clear evidence.

V. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED

64. The MTE mission identified a number of issues with project conception and implementation, which are discussed below. It should be clear to the reader that these observations are not provided as criticism but are meant to serve a learning process through which to improve project implementation in order to achieve its objectives with the time and resources which it has at its disposal. The mission reiterates the fact that it was impressed with project efforts and achievements to date.

A. Overall objective of the SPFS Pilot Project

65. The first and most important issue observed by the mission is stated above in the section on "Project Objectives and Design" and concerns the weakness in project formulation which has led the project to focus at the wrong level in implementation.

66. In order to achieve the SPFS objective of producing a positive impact on household food security among the very poor on a national scale, the **main** objective of an SPFS pilot project like this one is to develop a model for replication on a very large scale. Assisting the 4139 project farmers out of 14.5 million nationally can only be a drop in an ocean.

67. Of course, the project-assisted farmers must benefit substantially and sustainably from the project if it is to have a successful model. However, if these farmers benefit sustainably from the project, but this model is *not* then replicable and replicated on a very wide scale, this project will **not** have successfully achieved its goal.

68. This implies a rather important change of focus for the project team. Rather than focussing on the village and the farmer to judge progress toward achieving objectives, it should raise its collective eye to focus on the higher goal of **developing the workable, low-cost and effective model** that will be needed if Government is to adopt this approach for a food security programme at national scale. Beneficiary satisfaction with project interventions is a necessary *but not sufficient* indicator of progress in this direction.

69. Some other issues derive from this observation, of which three are flagged here:

Investment Costs and Maintenance Costs in Scaling Up

70. An important issue will need to be considered regarding the cost implications of scaling up in relation to the sustainability of village interventions:

- Will this model for achieving village food security need only "investment costs" up front? These costs are in relation to the amount of time (say one to two years) and money needed to establish functioning VBOs with development plans and revolving funds.
- Or does commitment to this approach also imply provision of "maintenance costs"? Maintenance costs derive from continuing - if lighter - support to assisted villages for an indefinite future. This refers to such activities as regular visits to the village by DAE staff to monitor and assist the VBO/FGDP mechanism.

71. If the SPFS approach is to be used on a very large scale, as intended, then it will put a strain on the GoB's human resource capacities to both start up many new communities and at the same time provide 'maintenance' assistance to all those already functioning. This issue **must be considered carefully in developing a recommended model and process**.

Institutional Target Group

72. Related to the above and as already pointed out in the Consultative Review Mission report of October 2003, this mission underlines the need for the project to **focus more on government and NGO staff** as they constitute a key element of the model being developed. It is on these staff that the quality of future replication will depend. They are already the object of project training and collaboration, which is positive. Now, in addition, thought must be given to likely and recommended institutional behaviour for success of SPFS food security initiatives, and supporting national policy if needed. These considerations will need to be worked into the model.

Social Mobilisation and NGO-DAE Willingness to Work Together

73. The SPFS project currently depends on Letters of Agreement between FAO and NGOs for the social mobilisation activities as well as some of the technology demonstrations. However, it is no secret that Government (including the DAE) has generally mutually stand-offish relations with NGOs. The SPFS model will need to consider whether it is **too big an assumption** that either (1) DAE will take the initiative to engage NGOs for local social mobilisation, not to mention technology advice, or (2) that DAE will be able to carry out these functions themselves without extensive training. Another alternative, though again quite difficult, would be to call in assistance from another appropriate ministry.

74. In addition, there are a few other issues (positive and negative) which the mission feels are important to flag:

B. Village level targeting of beneficiaries

75. Contrary to the Consultative Review of 2003, the MTE mission supports the targeting approach adopted by the project, i.e., community-level targeting. Long experience has shown that to attempt as an outside entity to isolate certain (poor) community members from the others by targeting them with benefits from a development project risks producing negative social (and ultimately economic) consequences for the villagers selected. In many cases these effects outweigh any benefits the project might bring.

76. In the case of the present initiative, the project seeks to select poor communities and then interact with the entire community (except absentees and those who do not want to participate). It is clear from the project documentation that the villages selected have very high levels of landless and marginal households - over 70% on average. All households in the community are requested to send one member to join the VBO. The mission is in agreement with this approach, as it is more likely that benefits will effectively reach the most disadvantaged if the rest of the village is involved.

C. Sustainability of Project Approaches

77. Project staff are optimistic regarding the future self-sustained continuation of the village development process set in motion by this project. However, as the mission stressed strongly in a group meeting with the PMU staff, the sustainability of all project interventions *without PMU* is yet to be demonstrated, in a field littered with the good intentions of past projects, many of which used similar approaches. The mission would like to stress this point in order to explain the recommendation (below) for phased withdrawal from project villages starting as soon as possible. Some points where sustainability appears uncertain to the mission:

- Any village or community has an individual internal identity, socio-cultural structure, economic organisation, and power/political hierarchy. Each village resident has a complex association with the village he/she has lived in generally for a lifetime, as well as with each individual in that community. The project proposes to introduce a new form of economic organisation and social gathering (the VBO) built mainly on outside perception of benefits together with limited appraisal involving some participation of village residents (the PRA). This foreign structure is overlaid on the existing indigenous situation, and may or may not last for a significant amount of time, depending on the members' perception of benefits versus the high transaction costs.

Nevertheless, it can sometimes be an example of a different way of managing limited resources and the social relationships between people, and may bring in lasting change.⁴ This hypothesis needs to be tested, however, and programmed withdrawal of support is suggested as the practical way to undertake this test.

- As discussed above, development of village revolving funds is very difficult without strong outside presence to guarantee fairness and impartiality. For now, NGOs (in some cases UAOs) are acting as guarantors and go-betweens with the formal banking sector. DAE staff are also acting as guarantors for the development plans. It is not at all certain that such mechanisms will survive the withdrawal of these powerful outside presences.
- Again as noted above, the use of precise business plans with rates of return for activities whose profitability is so minimal that it can be jeopardised by the slightest unforeseen event (a twisted ankle, the breaking of a box of jars, or worse, death of livestock or breakdown of a pump, etc.) leads to unrealistic expectations on the part of beneficiaries with little experience in this type of business analysis. At present the project is there to assist if something goes wrong, but when the project withdraws, these plans may be found not to be very practical.

D. Menu of Interventions - Need for Flexible Location-Specific Approaches

78. As noted above in the section on While stating the importance of working in different AEZs in order to find locally adapted models of intervention to reduce food insecurity, the project document goes on to provide a long list of specific technical interventions with the apparent intention that they all be applied everywhere.

79. In this mission's opinion, the project has followed these instructions too closely: the 21 villages are spread across the country purposely to cover several agro-ecological zones, and their distribution fully fulfils this requirement. At the same time, a nearly identical and quite long menu of interventions is being proposed in each of these sites with little attention to the different agricultural, ecological, economic and cultural conditions which characterise them. The differences are only in the detail of which type of animal or which crop variety is being recommended, and other similar tweaking of the list of set interventions. The technical specialist-cum-zonal coordinator arrangement of the PMU contributes to this as well, as the technical specialists tend to view their own specialty as being necessary and applicable everywhere.

⁴ One possibility could be for VBOs to be closely integrated with existing village power and political structures, essentially becoming a sort of village council. However this has wide-ranging implications as well, of course, in terms of governance, Government perception, relation to the Union Parishad and above, etc.

80. What would be advisable instead is for the specialists to sit together as a team for each individual zone and start from the ground up to study appropriate combinations of project components. This would probably also entail leaving out certain activities in certain areas if it is appropriate to focus more narrowly in order to have the greatest impact. For each particular village, the project should be experimenting with **development of the most beneficial, cost effective and locally adapted package or combination of interventions** in crops/trees and cropping systems, water management skills, livestock, fish, food processing for conservation or sale, locally appropriate nutrition solutions with the minimum impact on traditional habits (more likely to be sustained), etc.

81. This approach needs to maintain flexibility and an open mind: it is important to think beyond a set formula for the interventions, identifying where there are clear advantages of different sets or types of interventions. In this way, a number of tested scenarios can be proposed for a future expansion phase, and especially the process proposed for entry into a new site will be stronger.

82. It is worth noting that a very similar observation was made in the Consultative Review. It is also of note that this observation was discussed with the project team, who felt that it was not justified in that variability exists in the interventions between regions. However the MTE mission still believes that there is room to strengthen this aspect of project implementation. For that reason it has been moved from being a recommendation to being an issue for attention.

E. South-South Cooperation

83. While the mission saw anecdotal evidence of positive benefit from the SSC contribution of Chinese experts, overall based on observations, review of documents and discussions it must concur with the finding of the Consultative Review. While there is no lack of effort, the language, approach and cultural barriers separating the Chinese technicians from the local context are too strong to judge this a successful or, especially, a cost-effective component (overall this activity will cost the project over USD 400,000 - nearly 13% of the entire budget). Impact is minimal due to the difficulty of communication (only one English-speaking interpreter for every three technicians), and also because of the very different experience, knowledge set and approach of the Chinese team.

84. It is, however, worth noting that this sort of collaboration does have great value as a political and public relations initiative for relations between developing countries, whatever its value or lack of it in technical assistance terms.

F. Interaction with Related FAO Initiatives

85. FAO has a number of active projects which are using approaches which have great potential for complementarity with the SPFS. These include Integrated Horticulture and Nutrition, Integrated Pest Management, Empowerment of Coastal Fishing Communities, Community Livestock and Dairy Development, the recently started project Sustainable Livelihood Development of Urban Poor through Improved Management of Urban and Peri-urban Agricultural Micro-enterprises, and in the near future the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme.

86. While there has been some project interaction with the existing projects, this has been mostly at the level of discussions between project heads. The mission feels there is much room for more intensive exchange, through, for example, the use of trained trainers from one project to train staff or farmers on the others, etc.

87. In the particular case of the Food Policy project being initiated (MoU signed) between FAO's Food Security and Agricultural Projects Analysis Service (ESAF) and Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, the mission strongly encourages the project, as well as its home unit in FAO Headquarters (TCOS), to actively pursue involvement in this large (\$11m) EU and USAID funded programme. The SPFS expansion phase also needs an accompanying effort in development of supportive Government policy on food security, and this project would seem like an opportunity to have a say in support FAO is providing in this area.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Budget-neutral Extension of Project Closing Date

88. In the documentation provided to the mission, the project showed an expected savings at the end of the five-year project period of over USD 750,000. Suggestions were made in this documentation for the use of this money for overseas study tours by Ministry staff, and for the hiring of additional months of national consultants.

89. The MTE mission **recommends** instead that this money be used to request a budget revision to **extend the project closing date at least to June 2008**. This would allow pursuing the following recommendations more effectively, resulting in the consolidation of a stronger SPFS model for the expansion, and thus better achievement of the project's objective. The MTE specifically **recommends against** using any remaining funds for overseas study tours, as this would be an inefficient use of scarce resources.

B. Exit Strategy and Sustainability Testing

90. As discussed above, the sustainability of project interventions still remains to be proven. Additionally, in order to be useable, the model developed by the project must be implementable **within a reasonable amount of time**. This has been estimated in general at two to three years, but in any case much less than the full five years of this project.

91. For these reasons, the MTE mission **strongly recommends** that the SPFS project develop a systematic **trial "exit strategy" from the more 'advanced' communities**. This strategy should be developed and discussed **together with the VBOs concerned**, as well as the local government staff and NGOs involved with the community in question.

92. The project should carry out this exit strategy with the largest possible number of villages, in any case not less than three from different regions. A target date for complete cessation of project-supported assistance would be set, with a **clearly mapped-out work plan** for the gradual withdrawal of the various aspects of project support (PMU support, NGO support, and eventually subsidies to DAE staff for providing support). This date should be as early as is judged feasible by PMU staff, but **not later than July 2006** for complete withdrawal from the first round of selected communities (one full year before the current project closing date).

93. The withdrawal would need to be gradual over several months, in full discussion with the project beneficiaries. Villagers must be aware of the implications, e.g. the change implied in

relations with service providers, who will now need to be sought by villagers rather than appearing at their doorsteps on their own initiative, etc.

94. Following complete withdrawal of the project, a system would be set up for the project to periodically and unobtrusively **monitor the communities**, checking progress to see and understand the strengths and weaknesses of VBO and FGDP groups without direct support. The objective of this monitoring would be to validate the sustainability of the model being proposed, or identify where it should be modified to leave behind more effective groups.

C. Testing the Model in New Villages

95. In parallel with the sustainability testing, the MTE mission again **strongly recommends** that the project extend the experience gained in the first 21 villages to new **test villages**. These new villages would allow the project to apply experience gained so far and especially, allow testing and refining of the **streamlining** of intervention start-up and full cycle. These new villages should also receive **lower PMU involvement** to the extent possible, as part of testing the approach under 'real' (i.e., non-project) conditions.

96. The new test villages, again not less than three, should be select according to the same set of criteria used for the first round of villages, and in addition they could be either:

- in nearby villages in same Upazila (even the same Union) to test acquired capacity of DAE local staff, also making use of initial villages as champions and demonstrators; or
- in different Upazilas and even Districts to refine the DAE capacity building process and test it in terms of time required (now with the accumulated experience of past implementation).

D. Documenting Project Experience and Communicating

97. As part of both building and selling the SPFS model, the MTE mission **recommends** that the SPFS project **carefully document project processes, experiences and approaches**. In addition to developing a model, the project is accumulating a strong body of experience in applying that model through "learning by doing," and it is important not to lose this capacity after disbanding of the project institutions.

98. This documentation would take the form of guidelines for application of the model first of all, illustrated with case studies, and also lessons from experience, manuals on different technologies, audio-visuals (slide shows, videos, radio shows, etc.), high impact powerpoint presentations, etc. The various materials would need to be proactively targeted at specific potential users (government policymakers, NGOs, village and community organisations, donors and others).

99. In addition to producing the documentation, the project, in order to achieve its objective of leading into expansion, will also need to **build awareness and share information** with others outside of the project and especially with **policy analysts and policy makers**. The MTE mission **recommends** that the project enlist professional assistance (possibly from inside FAO) to **develop a Communication Strategy** to maximise the impact of the project model. Some activities included in such a strategy might be a newsletter, seminars or workshops, video presentations, presence on television and radio shows, etc.

E. Assessment of Similar Initiatives for Priority Setting

100. There are a great number of large and small initiatives ongoing in Bangladesh which are promoting similar types of integrated rural development to that promoted by the SPFS. Other projects again are promoting social mobilisation of the very poor within a more limited sectoral context, as in the case of the FAO projects cited above.

101. Even in the best of scenarios, the expansion of SPFS activities will always suffer from resource constraints and the need for prioritisation criteria in the selection of project intervention sites. One of those criteria should be **the presence or recent presence of initiatives with similar objectives** (food security, poverty alleviation, village organisation, food production, improved nutrition, income generation, food access, etc.).

102. In the remaining project period, the MTE mission **recommends** that the PMU should initiate a serious assessment of other similar initiatives going on in the country with a view to avoiding overlap and duplication of efforts in the same physical locations. This should include looking at recent past efforts.

F. Recommendations on implementation issues

103. Project management brought up several individual implementation issues which were discussed with the MTE mission, and the mission make the following recommendations on these issues:

- Following on the discussion above under IV.A (Project Budget and Expenditure) the MTE **strongly recommends** that FAO accelerate the approval of new procedures for operational advances to projects.
- As noted in para. 50, the mission recommends that the project request direct support from FAO in **learning and using the Farmer Field School methodology**.
- As noted in IV.C above on Project Management, the MTE mission highly recommends considering **promotion of the Deputy TL to the Team Leader position**, based on the proven quality of his work in that role.
- The TAPP (the GoB version of the project document which is used for implementation) needs to be updated to reflect several changes which have taken place since project startup (note also that any other recommendation of this evaluation which is implemented will need to be reflected in the TAPP):
 - a. the training allowance rate should be adjusted to reflect the latest MOA rates
 - b. the number of project sites should be corrected from 20 to the actual 21
 - c. the 21 motorcycles purchased for the SSC experts but which they were unable to use should be marked as transferred to the UAOs in the 21 project Upazilas
 - d. an additional vehicle (Prado # AJ07007) already transferred by FAO to the project should be reflected in the project's equipment
 - e. the use of the FGDP and RFS methodologies should be inserted in place of 'field demonstrations'
- It is recommended that the months of National Consultancies be increased as follows:
 - a. M&E to 15mm (from 8)
 - b. Gender to 8mm (from 7)

- c. Nutrition to 12mm (from 7)
 - d. Water Management to 8mm (from 7)
 - e. Farming Systems to 8mm (from 7)
- The National Fisheries Consultant should be redesignated as Zonal Coordinator (Fisheries Expert) and extended to the end of the project.
 - The MOA should seek to prepare absorption of project expert staff (five experts) into the Ministry after project termination.
 - The national counterpart staff currently working under the title "Crop Production Specialist" should be redesignated as "Deputy National Project Director" as this more accurately describes his duties.

ANNEX 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE

**for a
Joint Evaluation Mission by
Government of Japan, FAO and Government of Bangladesh
GCSP/BGD/033/JPN**

1. Background

The project addresses the problems of food security and malnutrition of rural, peri-urban and urban communities of different Agro Ecological Zone (AEZ) by mobilizing the target beneficiaries and increasing their capacity in decision making at all levels of planning, implementation and monitoring, constraint analysis on one hand and demonstrating effective local and improved technology for water control, intensification of cultivation and diversification of farming system on the other hand, in order to achieve self reliance for sustainable development.

The development objective of this SPFS project is to assist to improve national, household/individual food security on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis by rapidly increasing food production and productivity, reducing year to year variation of production and improve access to food as a contribution to equity and poverty alleviation.

SPFS-BGD project is one of the four SPFS projects funded by the Japanese Government and executed by FAO, others being Lao PDR, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The project EOD was 01 July 2002 and NTE is to be 30 June 2007, with the donor contribution of US\$ 3.296 million and the Bangladesh Government's contribution of US\$ 0.431 million in kind.

The project villages are located in 21 Upazilas of 16 Districts covering seven agricultural regions representing all six administrative divisions of the country. The target beneficiaries of this project are primarily the poorest of the poor and most disadvantaged segments of the population in 21 selected project villages. They belong to the landless, marginal, small and medium categories with particular emphasis on woman and disadvantaged group.

The Project Steering Committee is chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and so far three times the Steering Committee has been executed. The latest Steering Committee was taken on March 2005 and all the pending issues which were recommended by the Consultative Review Mission (CRM) have been cleared and approved.

One of the most remarkable activities of SPFS-BGD is Farmers Group Development Plan (FGDP) and Revolving Fund System (RFS) in the project sites and it will be a major function in supporting SPFS programme. It could be described that FGDP will be one of the engines to analyze the project feasibility and RFS will be another engine for assessing the household level project sustainability. The high authority of the country emphasized that SPFS project is highly evaluated and supported its institutionalization in the latest National SPFS dissemination workshop in March 2005.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The project document states that a tripartite evaluation will take place during the project. The present evaluation, scheduled at the mid-term of the project, is intended to make an in-depth assessment of the progress made in project implementation and propose recommendations for changes in the overall design and orientation of the project deemed necessary, along with operational recommendations on the work-plan for the remainder of the project and for facilitating national ownership of the programme.

3. Scope of the Evaluation

The joint tripartite evaluation mission (hereinafter refer to as “the mission”) will assess the:

- a) Relevance of the project to development priorities and needs of the country.
- b) Clarity and realism of the project's development and immediate objectives, including specification of targets and identification of beneficiaries and prospects for sustainability.
- c) Quality, clarity and adequacy of project design including:
 - clarity and logical consistency between, inputs, activities, outputs and progress towards achievement of objectives (quality, quantity and time-frame);
 - realism and clarity in the specification of prior obligations and prerequisites (assumptions and risks);
 - realism and clarity of external institutional relationships, and in the managerial and institutional framework for implementation and the work plan;
 - likely cost-effectiveness of the project design.
- d) Efficiency and adequacy of project implementation including: availability of funds as compared with budget for both the donor and national component; the quality and timeliness of input delivery by both FAO and the Government; timeliness and quality of activities; managerial efficiency in dealing with implementation difficulties; adequacy of monitoring and reporting; the extent of national support and commitment; and the quality and quantity of administrative and technical support by FAO.
- e) Actual and potential project results, including a full and systematic assessment of outputs produced to date and progress made towards achieving the immediate objectives:
 - The communities develop self-reliance in diagnosing opportunities and constraints, and testing and implementing practical solutions to achieve sustainable food security.
 - Strengthening institutional capacity all levels.
 - The production and productivity of rice, wheat, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables of resource poor farmers increased crop intensification through improved water control and integrated nutrient management.
 - Promote farming system diversification and nutrition and energy conservation awareness and develop location specific integrated farming system of rural house hold especially women and vulnerable groups to enhance production, income generation and availability of nutritional food and to improve nutritional status of the people.
 - Promote small scale agro-processing, post harvest handling technology and on-farm and off-farm income generating activities through promotion of community based produce handling methods, supported by marketing, credit and other agriculture support services and identification of constrain.
- f) The prospects for sustaining the project's results by the beneficiaries and the host institutions after the termination of the project, particularly regarding:
 - intensive livestock and fisheries production system;
 - marketability of agricultural products;
 - strengthened government extension, communication and training services;
 - organization and management of farmers groups, including management of village revolving fund;
 - general socio-economic improvements (in particular for groups, women and disadvantaged people);

- capacity of government to sustain the project initiatives (central, provincial and district government) and;
- replicability of the project results by the Government of Bangladesh.

g) The overall cost-effectiveness of the project, especially in terms of serving as piloting various development activities, including the identification of appropriate approaches and lessons/issues for future.

In conducting the evaluation, the mission will pay particular attention to the following issues: project ownership, partnerships among stakeholders, effectiveness of South-South cooperation, gender awareness, appropriateness of site selection, relevance of planning and training approaches, and viability of the micro credit and revolving fund systems.

Based on the above analysis the mission will draw specific conclusions and make proposals for any necessary further action by Government and/or FAO/donor to ensure sustainable development, including any need for additional assistance and activities of the project prior to its completion. The mission will draw attention to any lessons of general interest and comment on the long-term relevance to the overall objectives of the SPFS-BGD.

4. Composition of the Mission

The mission will comprise:

- Team leader (FAO-PBEE)
- Specialist in “Rural Development” (Japan)
- Specialist in “food security” (Bangladesh)

The mission will be supported in its field work by resource persons, comprising the Regional SPFS Coordinator and the TCOS food security officer (HQ). It should be briefed and debriefed by the responsible FAO operations (TCOS) and technical officers. Mission members should be independent and thus have no previous direct involvement with the project either with regard to its formulation, implementation or backstopping. They should preferably have experience of evaluation.

5. Timetable and Itinerary of the Mission

The timetable and Itinerary is shown as follows. This trust funded programme is supported by the Government of Japan therefore the courtesy call to Embassy of Japan and discussion is planned. (see Annex-1.)

6. Consultations

The mission will maintain close liaison with the representatives of the donor and FAO and the concerned national agencies, as well as with national and international project staff. Although the mission should feel free to discuss with the authorities concerned anything relevant to its assignment, it is not authorized to make any commitments on behalf of the Government, the donor, or FAO.

7. Reporting

The mission is fully responsible for its independent report which may not necessarily reflect the views of the Government, the donor or FAO. The report will be written in conformity with the headings as given in the Annex-2.

The report will be completed, to the extent possible, in the country and the findings and recommendations fully discussed with all concerned parties and wherever possible consensus achieved.

The mission will also complete the FAO Project Evaluation Questionnaire.

The mission leader bears responsibility for finalization of the report, which will be submitted to FAO within two weeks of mission completion. FAO will submit the report to Government(s) and donor together with its comments.

Points to be discussed

1. Technical point
 - How to secure the project sustainability
 - Role of Government, NGOs and Farmers' group
 - Understanding of FGDP and RFS and its progress
 - Reliability of NGOs and consultants' report
 - Way of Micro Credit/ Micro Capital Grant
 - How to proceed project implementation with cash advance
 - Field implementation status at the site
 - Condition of technical backstopping (title and timing)
 - Technical backstopping status
2. Administrative point
 - Understanding of SPFS management by FAO representation
 - Understanding of SPFS management by GoB (project ownership)
 - Working modality (FAO, PMU, PMU and RC)
 - SSC effectiveness
 - Consistency of project document and TAPP
 -
3. Personal point
 - Function of NPD, CPS and performance
 - Function of each PMU staff (TL, DTL (NPO), ZCs, PO) and performance
 - Function of FAO and performance
 - Contract situation by MS319
 - Support staff's contract condition
4. Others
 - Status of any necessary provision (cars, computers, communication and equipment) for smooth implementation of the programme
 - Coordination towards the up scaling

ANNEX 2

ITINERARY AND PERSONS MET

	Date	Day	Activities	Persons Met
1	22/05/05	Sun	11:55 Hrs – Arrive in Dhaka 14:00 Hrs – Check in at Hotel Sheraton 15:00 Hrs – Project Document Review	
2	23/05/05	Mon	09:00 Hrs – MTE Team Members’ Meeting FAO Representation 11:00 Hrs - Meeting with FAOR 12:00 Hrs – Meeting with DG, DAE 14:00 Hrs – Meeting with Secretary, MoA 15:30 Hrs – Meeting with NPD, SPFS	Akhter Hamid, Project Deputy Team Leader Shin Imai, Regional SPFS Coordinator Bui Thi Lan - FAO Representative Begum Nurun Naher - FAO Programme Officer Md. Ibrahim Khalil, DG/DAE The Secretary, MOA Md. Abul Hossain Mollah, NPD
3	24/05/05	Tue	09:00 Hrs – Meeting with DTL & PMU 11:40 Hrs – Fly to Barisal by GMG Airlines 12:15 Hrs – Arrive at Barisal 14:30 Hrs – Visit Gopalganj Sadar site 17:30 Hrs – Arrive at Gopalganj	Project Team (specialty/zone): Md. Nurul Alam, Agronomy/Faridpur Syed Alef Hossein, Livestock/Khulna Kazi Muzammel Hoque, OFWM/Rajshahi Md. Shahjahan, Agroforestry/Sylhet & Bandarban Sreekanta Sheel, Agroprocessing/Sherpur Mohammed Ali Reja, National Consultant, Fisheries
4	25/05/05	Wed	08:30 Hrs – Leave Gopalganj for Fakirhat 09:30 Hrs - Visit Fakirhat Project site 11:00 Hrs - Leave Fakirhat for Bagherpara 14:30 Hrs – Visit Bagherpara Project site 18:35 Hrs – Fly to Dhaka by GMG Airlines 19:15 Hrs – Arrive in Dhaka	Mr. Md. Mukhlesur Rahman, ADAE, Barisal Region Mr. Md. Chand Mian, DDAE, Gopalganj District Mr. Nikhil Kumar Saha, UAO, Gopalganj Sadar Mr.Md.Yasin Ali, ADAE, Jessore Region Mr. Jatindra Chandra Modak, DDAE, Bagherhat Mr.Abdul Aziz Faraizy, UAO, Fakirhat Mr.Md. Meser Ali, DDAE, Jessore Mr. Sheikh Hamayet Hossain, UAO, Bagherpara
5	26/05/05	Thu	09:35 Hrs – Fly to Sylhet by GMG Airlines 10:05 Hrs – Arrive in Sylhet 11:00 Hrs – Visit Jaiantapur Project site 12:30 Hrs – Leave for Sylhet 14:30 Hrs – Meeting with SSC team 16:00 Hrs – Return to Sylhet	Mr. Md. Usman Ghan, ADAE, Sylhet Region Mr. Md. Kamrul Huda, DDAE, Sylhet District Mr. Md. Asadullah, UAO, Jaintapur
6	27/05/05	Fri	11:00 Hrs – Fly to Dhaka by GMG Airlines 11:35 Hrs – Arrive in Dhaka	
7	28/05/05	Sat	08:30 Hrs – Document Review, Discussions with the PMU	
8	29/05/05	Sun	09:00 Hrs – PMU Meeting 11:30 Hrs – Drive to Mithapukur 17:30 Hrs – Visit Mithapukur Project site 19:30 Hrs – Return to Rangpur	Mr. Md. Zakir Hossain, ADAE, Rangpur Mr. Md. Aynul Hoque, DDAE, Rangpur Mr. Md. Harun-or-Rashid, UAO, Rangpur Sadar Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman, UAO, Mithapukur
9	30/05/05	Mon	09:00 Hrs – Visit Rangpur Sadar site 11:00 Hrs – Leave Rangpur Sadar for Saidpur 12:35 Hrs – Leave for Dhaka by Biman	

			14:00 Hrs – Arrive in Dhaka 15:00 Hrs – Mission discussions at PMU	
10	31/05/05	Tue	Report preparation	
11	01/06/05	Wed	09:00 Hrs – Wrap-up meeting with PMU 10:30 Hrs – Wrap-up meeting with Ministry of Agriculture and DG, DAE 12:30 Hrs – Meeting with the Ambassador of Japan in Bangladesh 14:30 Hrs – Meeting with the Honourable Minister of Agriculture 19:00 Hrs – Dinner hosted by NPD 21:00 Hrs – Wrap-up meeting with FAOR	(see list below) H.E. Matsushiro Horiguchi, Ambassador Shinya Tsuruda, 2nd Secretary H.E. M.K. Anwar, Min. of Agriculture
12	02/06/05	Thu	11:00 Hrs – Leave for Bangkok	
13	03/06/05	Fri	Debriefing at FAO RAP	Ron van Nijnanten, CPO Alistair Hicks, Agroindustry & Postharvest Hiroshi Hiraoka, Soils Biplap K. Nandi, Nutrition G. Keertisinghe, Horticulture Thierry Facon, Irrigation Yuji Nino, Land Management Revathi Balakrishnan, Gender