

Promoting socially inclusive and sustainable agricultural intensification in West Bengal and Bangladesh

Researchers with NGOs will work with disadvantaged rural communities to explore and understand how agricultural intensification affects them.

We will develop and use new tools and engagement processes to understand the risks and trade-offs involved in agricultural intensification.

This information will be used to support the design and delivery of public and private programs that are more socially inclusive and support women, landless, tribal people and the poorest households access benefits of agricultural intensification.

Over the past 50 years there has been tremendous increases and intensification of food production in India and Bangladesh, largely by use of high-yielding crop varieties, better animal breeds and animal husbandry, aquaculture, fertilization, mechanisation, irrigation, and pesticides. Agricultural intensification is undeniably increasing food production and ensuring food demand is met. In broad terms it is also helping alleviate poverty.

However, this has come at the cost of an increasing social disparity between more affluent land holders and socially disadvantaged groups such as landless or marginal smallholders, women-headed households, and tribal minorities. This is because affluent land holders are in a stronger position to capture the benefits and can better absorb the risks of agricultural intensification. Consequently, these marginal groups are much more exposed to unintended consequences of agricultural intensification.



Women need to be involved in the design of the research

Project aim and objectives

The aim of this project is to understand factors and risks influencing change, apply new evaluation tools, develop opportunities and provide policy options to promote more socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable agricultural intensification in West Bengal and Bangladesh, with an emphasis on water. This will be addressed through the following project objectives:

1. To understand how key social, institutional, economic and environmental factors affect livelihood risks, social exclusion, and environmental degradation in agricultural intensification
2. To identify opportunities to manage risks of agricultural intensification and promote social inclusivity and equity under different agricultural development scenarios
3. To promote the development of socially inclusive, equitable and sustainable agricultural intensification policies and engagement processes.

Research approach

The complex nature of the research being undertaken requires an approach that integrates social, institutional and biophysical research disciplines and methods, that bridge the community to policy scales, and that engages next-users of research results (NGOs, government agencies, private enterprises) as integral project partners. The project will pilot public-private partnership and value chain interventions **as the project evolves**.

The research will be carried out through close partnerships with other ACIAR projects already conducting research into intensification options in South Asia. The project's three case study locations are in two broad agro-ecological settings of the Eastern Indo Gangetic region.

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1. Eastern Gangetic Plains - Coochbehar, India
2. Coastal Zone - Khulna and Patuakhali, Bangladesh.



Fishponds can be an alternative livelihood source for marginal small holders in south western Bangladesh

Project partners

The project research team comprises the Australian organisations CSIRO Agriculture (lead), Edith Cowan University and Australian National University, who are collaborating with the Livelihoods and Natural Resource Management Institute (India), the Indian Institute of

Technology Kharagpur and the Bangladesh Agriculture University. YesBank (India) is the private sector research collaborator. The three core NGO partners are PRADAN, CDHI (northern West Bengal) and Shushilan (coastal zone, Bangladesh).

Expected project outcomes

- Pilot public-private partnerships supporting socially excluded groups through value chain and insurance approaches
- Implementation of guidelines and design principles for agricultural intensification programs that are more socially inclusive, equitable and sustain the natural resource base by government policy partners
- Sharing and uptake lessons across sectors and organisations to enhance social inclusion in other research projects and within ACIAR
- Enhancement and dissemination of NGO and community based organisations best practice in achieving social inclusion and mobilisation of community resources.

Next steps

- Engaging with local communities to implement the project in the study areas
- Targeted engagement with policy makers and major donors to establish partnerships between the project and relevant development programs
- Commence social survey and market survey work.

The project begins in March 2016 and will continue until early 2020.

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