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Farmer Ami Akter brings her produce to a collection center supported by the LEAN project.

LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS – A SUCCESSFUL EXTENSION MODEL IN BANGLADESH'S CHATTOGRAM HILL TRACTS

The “Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition” (LEAN) project operated in the remote Chattogram Hill Tracts in Bangladesh from September 2018 to February 2024. The overall objective was to contribute to improved maternal and child nutrition. The project reached 347’000 people who report an increased and diversified nutrition because they are newly aware of the importance a balanced diet and can now afford it. To the significant increase of people’s income contributed LEAN’s Local Service Provider Approach. A capitalization conducted in February 2024 served to document this approach.

The Chattogram Hill Tracts belong to the most remote areas of Bangladesh. More than 1.6 million people from 13 ethnic groups inhabit the three districts. The area is characterized by livelihoods depending on traditional farming practices, difficult access, sparsely spread governmental services, long distances to markets and a complex governance structure. Poverty rates are higher than in the plains. Malnutrition is widespread resulting in stunting, wasting and underweight of children below five years.

LEAN'S BASIC INTERVENTION MODEL

In response to an invitation of the European Union, the project developed a simple but systemic concept to address malnutrition that can be summarized under the title "Policy – Pull – Push".

- **Policy:** In its first result area LEAN worked towards an enhanced delivery of relevant government services through improved coordination, allocation of budgets for nutrition and influencing policies.
- **Pull:** The second result area served to create demand for an improved nutrition through various awareness building measures.
- **Push:** The third result area aimed at an improved supply of nutritious food through the promotion of nutrition-sensitive and climate smart value chains. To this end the main implementation mechanism was the introduction of Local Service Providers (LSP) who facilitated linkages between producers and public and private actors.

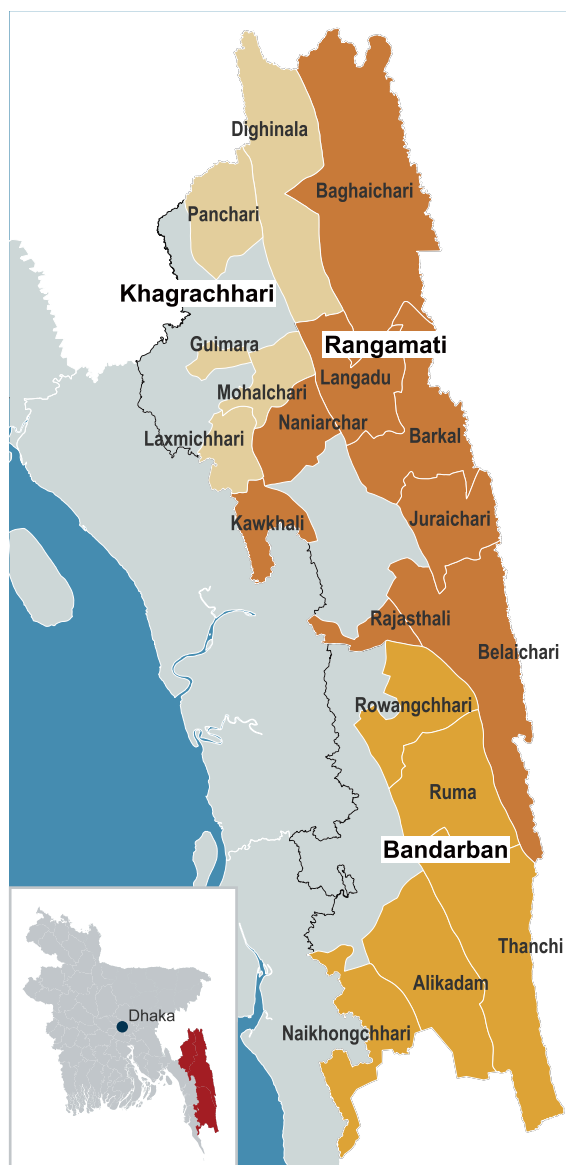
ELEMENTS OF LSP APPROACH

The LEAN project replicated and adapted in the Chattogram Hill Tracts an agricultural extension approach by market actors that Helvetas had co-developed in the plains of Bangladesh. Later it has been replicated in other parts of the world. In the Chattogram Hill Tracts the intervention started with the selection of three most relevant nutrition sensitive value chains, namely 1) vegetables, 2) fruits and 3) native chicken. This was followed by the drafting of a wide array of illustrated extension materials that served to capacitate government staff e.g. from the Department of Agriculture in the project area. The government extensionists helped project staff to identify the first batches of Local Service Providers (LSP) among advanced farmers. Subsequently these were trained by project staff and government extension officers. Topics included climate smart agricultural and poultry production technologies, nutrition, entrepreneurship and establishing market linkages. By the end of the project there were 1'080 active and trained LSP (of them 382 females) who collaborated with around 100'000 producers organized in 5'345 Producer Groups.

LEAN IN BRIEF

Project title: Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition project (LEAN)

Overall objective: To contribute to improved maternal and child nutrition in the Chattogram Hill Tracts



Target area: 3 districts, 18 Upazilas

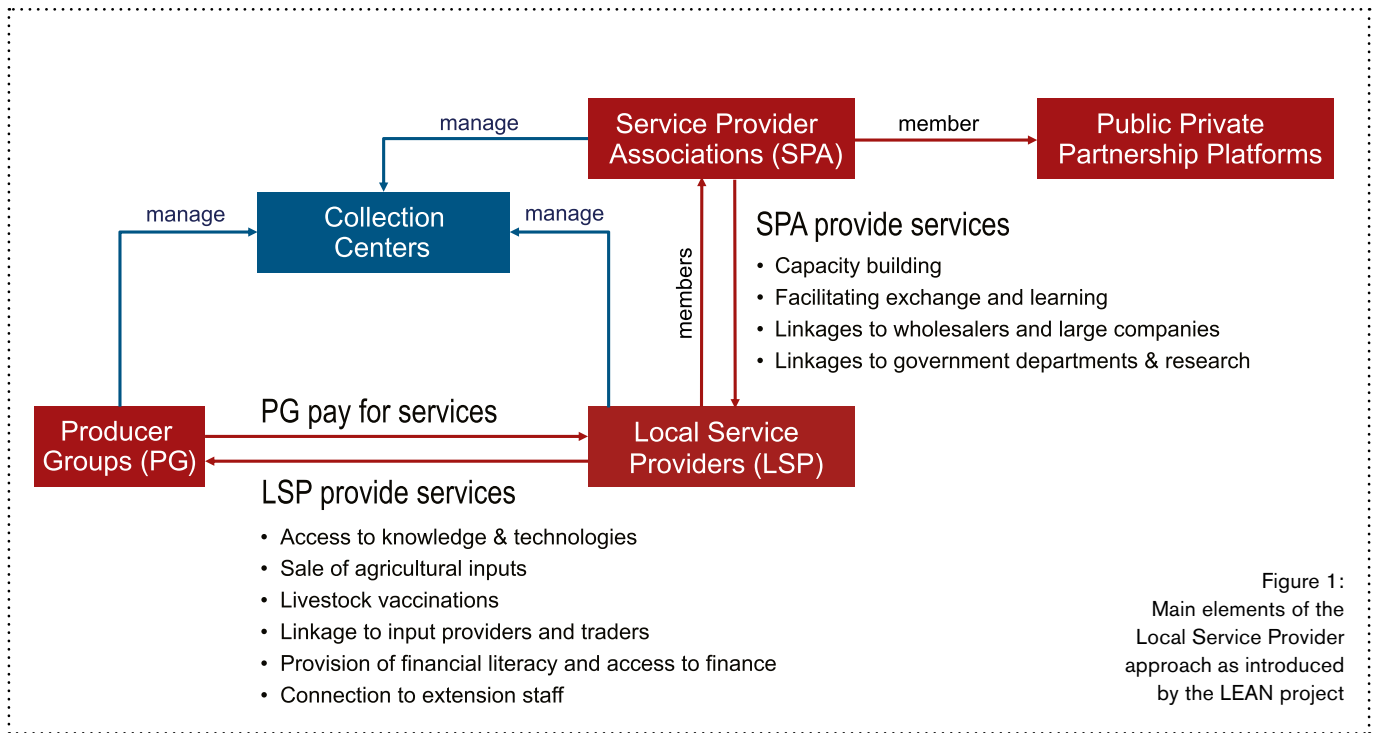
Target group: 82,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, 100,000 children < 5 years, 100,000 adolescent girls

Budget: 11.5 million EURO

Donor: European Commission

Implementation period: 9/2018 – 2/2024 (66 months)

Consortium: United Purpose (lead), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Caritas Bangladesh, Integrated Development Foundation, Jum Foundation



The figure above provides an overview of the elements of the LSP approach:

- Producer Groups:** LSPs formed producer groups based on the market potential. Services to the producer groups range from development of business plans, provision of technical advice, support to get access to input and buyers. The LSPs also support producers to adapt to climate change and introduce technologies to reduce disaster risks. The LSPs interact with the members of the producer groups collectively (training sessions) and individually (provision of advice and sale of services). The members of the producer groups consistently reported that they 1) increased their production volumes (e.g. more land under vegetables, more chicken), 2) increased their yields through modern production techniques and better quality seeds, 3) reduced their production costs by replacing chemical fertilizer with compost and insecticides with biological pest control measures (e.g. pheromone traps), 4) increased their sales prices through direct connections to Collection Centers or traders sourcing the products at the farmgate.
- Local Service Providers:** The incentives for the LSP to interact with the producers are the sale of agricultural inputs (such as high-quality seeds and vermicompost) and to render payable services such as the vaccination of chicken. They act as sales agents of local agricultural input shops or as the extended arm of government programs (e.g. vaccination). This creates quadruple-win situations: 1) Farmers increase their production, 2) LSPs generate an income, 3) agro-dealers increase their sales and 4) government officers reach their targets. In addition, the LSPs act as connector to traders who in turn can procure goods



May Hla Khoi Marma in her bottle gourd plantation. She has attended LEAN training sessions on nutrition and agriculture

in larger quantities. LSPs typically generate their main income from being an advanced farmer. The work as LSP is complementary and thus provides only a partial contribution to the family income.

- **Service Provider Associations:** LSPs unite on Upazila (sub-district) level into SPAs. The project facilitated their set-up and provided some basic equipment including a laptop computer. The SPAs are the bodies that establish the connections to larger input supply and wholesale companies. They also maintain the contacts to the governmental agricultural extension structure at sub-district and district level. The SPAs provide capacity building to the LSP and facilitate exchange and learning. They have a bank account. Their financing models vary but include membership fees, income from own commercial operations and in certain cases the management of Collection Centers.
- **Collection Centers:** The Collection Centers are simple shelters equipped with a reliable scale. They serve as assembly markets for agricultural products at strategically chosen locations e.g. at the endpoint of a road. The project co-financed their construction with locally available materials. By the end of the project there were 85 of them. Usually twice a week the producer groups bring their surplus production. The traders know this or in special situations the LSP or the Collection Center Committee alert them. The management models vary as per the decision of the local actors. Sometimes it is a Producer Group that runs the Center, in other cases the LSP is responsible and in third cases the SPA themselves manage several collection centers. There are various solutions how the centers are financed, e.g. by volume based fees paid by the traders or by contributions from the producers since they get a higher profit margin as if they would sell individually at their farmgate.
- **Public-Private-Partnership Platforms:** The SPAs are represented in Public-Private-Partnership Platforms on Upazila level. This in Bangladesh formally recognized extension method serves to unite government extensionists and private companies to discuss on Upazila level potentials and bottlenecks related to specific value chains. Identified problems shall be resolved through jointly agreed action plans.



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Sajeda Begum is a Local Service Provider who has been trained by the LEAN project. She produces and sells vermicompost.

OUTLOOK

The LSP approach is an advisory service provided by market actors, which serves as an interface between primary producers and markets. The example of LEAN shows the power of this approach to reach scale (100'000 producers) through an economically sustainable extension model even in a challenging environment such as the Chattogram Hill Tracts. There are only winners.



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