

# Food security through GO-NGO partnership

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THE greatest challenge that Bangladesh had to face after independence was the supply of food for its growing population, and it is still one of the major challenges today. Being a disaster-prone economy Bangladesh faces food availability problem frequently. Since the possibility of horizontal expansion (of cropped area) has already been exhausted, enhancement in productivity should come through vertical augmentation of the productivity by adopting different ways and overcoming some pertinent constraints as far as possible. In fact, the key to success in meeting the challenge of sustainable food security lies with further technological advancement in crop sector and its proper dissemination and adoption at desired level.

Enhancement in productivity requires technology development and proper dissemination to the end users for rapid adoption. Although public sector-research institutes are responsible for developing the much needed production technologies, exploitation of its potentiality highly depends on timely dissemination and proper adoption. Transfer of technologies and diversification/intensification of crop production programmes through appropriate extension services are of crucial importance to our agriculture.

Nevertheless, reaching proven technologies to the end-users is often takes a long time, causing delay in harnessing the potentials of the technologies developed by the research institutions. This can be accelerated through GO-NGO partnership in an effective manner. Research extension linkages of the public sector are governed by some formal regulations, and the technology dissemination process in the public sector is considered as being a bit lengthy. That's why it is always argued that much longer time is needed to reach new technologies to the end users and, therefore, such dissemination system is regarded as a slow technology delivery system. It is not desirable for achieving food security in a land scarce economy like ours.

However, in most cases the regulations of the NGOs are flexible and can be adopted quickly if it is advantageous for the organisation and for the eventual beneficiaries. The extension providers of the NGO sector can directly contact the researchers and take out the mature technologies for demonstration/validation, which is sometimes difficult for the government sector extension provider. Therefore, strengthening of public-private interface for quick and effective dissemination of developed technologies to the doorsteps of the end users is necessary, and would eventually help rapid adoption of modern technologies and enhance productivity level.

Public sector organisations (GOs) are mainly responsible for the development of agricultural technologies. All the research institutes under the National Agricultural Research System (e.g. BRRI, BARI, BJRI, BINA etc.) are responsible for the development of improved technologies in their respective fields. These institutions have both national and international linkages to carry out research activities and are operated under the leadership of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), the apex body of the public research organisations in Bangladesh. These organisations are not mandated to disseminate agricultural technologies, although they do it on a limited scale as part of adaptive research and technology validation processes.

Non-government organisations (NGO) and the private sector are generally

users/disseminators, not the generators of agricultural technologies. Only a few NGOs like Brac do research for development of improved crop varieties and associated technologies.

As done for technology generation, the dissemination activities are mostly handled by the public sector and the main agencies responsible for this job are (i) Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), (ii) Department of Fisheries (DOF),

through its Agriculture and Food Security Programme in complementing the efforts of the government's food security campaign. However, the dissemination mechanism is very simple and straightforward. The research agencies provide training to the extension personnel on the newly developed technologies. Extension personnel also participate in adaptive research in the final stage of technology validation and thus they learn about the new technologies. The extension providers also organise training for the farmers on the production packages of the improved technologies. That is how agricultural technologies spread out. The above process also works for the government organisations.

It is worthwhile to mention that the NGOs working in the agriculture sector harness improved technologies from the research agencies. Conventionally, the research agencies sometimes provide training to the NGO extension providers on a limited scale as part of GO-NGO collaboration.

Brac is working in almost all the development sectors including agriculture. Moreover, it has been working in livelihoods restoration and improvement of the victims of cyclone Sidr and Aila along with eradicating the adverse effects of monga in the northern belt of the country.

However, in the context of rehabilitation of the cyclone affected people, the role of NGOs could be specifically mentioned: In

2007, the cyclone SIDR hit Bangladesh and caused extensive damage of properties including standing crops. There was catastrophic damage of assets and crop seeds. In this situation, NGOs came forward with packages of financial and technological interventions to restore the livelihoods of the SIDR victims of southern Bangladesh. They introduced for the first time hybrid rice in both *boro* and *aus* seasons; hybrid maize and sunflower in *rabi* season, and different types of hybrid and open pollinated vegetables those were grown by the farmers throughout the year.

Farmers lost their livestock during cyclone Sidr, resulting in shortage of draft power, and this emerged as one of the main constraints to crop production. NGOs developed local entrepreneurs for providing land preparation and irrigation services to the farmers through their micro-credit programmes. As a result of the interventions large areas came under both hybrid and high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice production. The hybrid rice introduced in aus season for the first time performed well in the coastal region and had enormous impact on the farming communities and among the extension providers as well.

Some of the important features of public-private partnership are highlighted below:

- Scope of policy liberalisation for NGOs and private sector is bigger, leading to better access to formal input delivery system;
- Production area and outlets of NGOs and private sector are mostly at grass root level and doorsteps to farmers;
- Scope to work with marginal and resource poor farmers at local level through local NGOs;
- Locally demand driven technology/variety may be chosen for demonstration and/or multiplications;
- Popularising the location specific and newly developed technologies among the end users.

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## Remembering Neil Armstrong

**ASIF SIDDIQI**

IT has been about a month since the passing of Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon. He was 82. A public memorial service for him was held on September 13 at the Washington National Cathedral in the American capital. Armstrong, who was a navy pilot in his youth, was buried at sea.

All accounts of Armstrong's life suggest he was a modest and private man. After his mission, he worked briefly in an administrative capacity for Nasa. In 1971, he became a professor in aeronautical engineering at the University of Cincinnati. He had two passions in life: piloting airplanes and engineering. He had done much of the former, first as a test pilot and then as a Nasa astronaut. Now he could indulge in the latter.

For nearly a decade he taught at the university and remained completely unassuming, normal even. He refused corporate sponsorships, offers to sit on the boards of multinationals, honorary doctorates and millions of dollars to write his memoirs. He rarely granted interviews or spoke to the press. He did, from time to time to give public talks, but only if the occasion had some greater value: a commemoration of some great aviation event or educational functions involving young students. In the rare moments when he publicly spoke, he was eloquent, modest, funny, and self-deprecating.

I did not know Neil Armstrong personally but our paths did cross and for that I feel grateful. The first time was in late 1969, a few months after his flight to the moon. As part of Nasa's efforts to publicise the accomplishments of the Apollo programme the three Apollo astronauts were sent off on a goodwill tour of 24 cities across the world. On October 25, 1969, the crew arrived in Dhaka. My father took his three-year-old son with him and braved the crowds at Airport Road to catch a glimpse of the crew. It is one of my earliest memories. We are standing by the side of the road when a convertible car slowly drives by with the three men and their wives waving. I did not understand why these men were so important, but my father's enthusiasm was infectious, and I smiled and laughed with him.

My second interaction with Neil Armstrong

remains the most meaningful to me. A few years before, I had written a book, subsequently published by Nasa on the history of the Russian space programme. My childhood memory prompted me to decide to send a copy of the book to Neil Armstrong. He was not easy to track down. A deeply private person, he closely guarded his personal life. But I was able to obtain a post office box address in Ohio. I wrote Armstrong a short letter and with it enclosed a copy of my book. In my letter, I mentioned my fading memory of his brief visit to Dhaka.

It goes without saying that I expected to hear nothing in return. But exactly a week later, I received an e-mail from "N. A. Armstrong." It was short and to the point:

Dear Professor Siddiqi,

Thank you for your letter and copy of your recent text, *Challenge to Apollo: The Soviet Union and the Space Race, 1945-1974*.

It is a heavy text and, therefore, not so likely to be carried on airplane trips where I most often have the chance to read something of my choice. I hope to have a bit of free time over the holidays and look forward to seeing the product of your serious efforts.

I do remember my visit to Dacca in what was then known, if I remember correctly, as East Pakistan. Seldom, if ever, have I seen such enthusiasm on the part of the crowds watching the motorcade you remembered.



NEIL ARMSTRONG

You were most thoughtful to share your work with me and I send my very best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,  
Neil Armstrong

There was something earnest about his words. He didn't have to write back but he did. Perhaps he was as considerate and thoughtful as some people said he was. I was amazed (and pleased) that he remembered anything at all about that whirlwind trip to Dhaka.

My last contact with Armstrong came in 2009 during celebrations for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first moon landing. I went to a symposium attended by him. During an intermission, I went up to the former astronaut and introduced myself as the author of a book that he owned. He was gracious but brief. I am not by nature someone who gets excited being in the vicinity of famous people but there was something extraordinary about his presence.

There is no need to idealise Armstrong -- undoubtedly, like all people he had his shortcomings. His biographer, James Hansen, noted that Armstrong could be distant, stubborn even. Some say that the first man on the moon could have been a much more active campaigner for raising funds for space exploration. Regardless, he did possess admirable qualities worth emulating: keen intelligence, curiosity and fearlessness about the unknown, and a deep humility.

When he died on August 25, Armstrong's family released a brief statement about his illness and passing. The concluding words of that obituary encapsulate both the wonder and the irreverence which characterised the late astronaut. It concluded: "For those who may ask what they can do to honour Neil, we have a simple request. Honour his example of service, accomplishment and modesty, and the next time you walk outside on a clear night and see the moon smiling at you, think of Neil Armstrong and give him a wink."

I cannot think of a more fitting epitaph for the man.

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## Open letter to Hilary Clinton

WE would like to draw your attention to the plight of Rohingyas, an ethnic group in Southeast Asia that has been declared stateless, and severely persecuted, by the Myanmar Government since 1972. Fresh violence began in June of this year and although there are talks and promises of democracy and political change, we see little interest in resolving the "Rohingya crisis."

We are deeply concerned that while the other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, primarily the Karens and Karennis, are being resettled into developed countries such as the US, there is complete indifference to the plight of the Rohingyas. Facing continued repression in Myanmar and living in squalid conditions in Bangladesh, as about 350,000 have done for the last forty years despite UNHCR presence, the Rohingyas deserve better. Why does the UNHCR not have a plan of action with regard to the Rohingyas? Speculative claims of "terror links" because the Rohingyas are Muslims cannot absolve the international community of its responsibility. We find this negligence on the part of aid and humanitarian agencies discriminatory and deplorable.

As a strong advocate for human rights all over the world, the US has a responsibility to ensure that oppression against minorities does not become the norm as in the case of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. We therefore request you to:

- 1) Use your good offices to convince the government of Myanmar to recognise the Rohingya population as rightful citizens of Myanmar;
- 2) Enable the resettlement of the Rohingya population into third countries as a humane and durable solution to the refugee crisis;
- 3) Provide increased financial support to countries such as Bangladesh to help lighten the burden of hosting these refugees and facilitate their resettlement.

We look forward to your prompt intervention and leadership in finding ways to resolve the crisis compassionately and permanently.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Navine Murshid on behalf of the Executive Committee Members, Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI).

(BDI is a US-based non-profit corporation promoting socio-economic development in Bangladesh.)