



A Haribhanga mango orchard at Podaganj village in Dinajpur's Mithapukur upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

HARIBHANGA MANGO OF RANGPUR

Framers eye good production this year

Harvesting to start next week

KONGKON KARMAKER

The growers of Haribhanga mango variety in Rangpur are expecting a good yield of this delicious seasonal fruit this year, which is considered a revolutionary crop in changing the agriculture economy in the district over the last ten years.

This year the business will be of around Tk 200 crore, said the traders. According to the farmers, the harvesting of Haribhanga in Rangpur is to begin at the end of June.

Local farmers said, Haribhanga is grown in other northern districts, including Nilphamari, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh, but it is more delicious if it is from Rangpur, for the favourable weather and soil. It is better if the mango is from either Mithapukur or Badarganj Upazila of Rangpur.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Rangpur, at least 3,300 hectares of land have been brought under mango cultivation in Rangpur. Of them, Haribhanga mango variety has been cultivated in 1,865 hectares of land.

The production would be around 27,925

metric tonnes.

Overall mango production in the district would be around 44,000 metric tonnes. There are around 4,000 commercial mango orchards in Rangpur.

During a visit to different places recently, including Akhiraht, Podaganj and Matherhat in Mithapukur and Gopalpur of Badarganj, recently, this correspondent found the orchards filled with mangoes. The growers were seen busy taking care of the orchards. Farmers said that the harvesting will start from the end of June. Farmers always get a better price of this particular variety of mango as it is harvested late.

Md Rafiqul Islam, a Haribhanga mango grower of Podaganj village in Mithapukur Upazila, said that this special mango has played a significant role in changing the economy of Rangpur. "Suffering a loss from agriculture is a common phenomenon among the farmers, but Haribhanga mango variety is helping the farmers stay afloat in such situation", he said.

Many farmers have switched to mango cultivation over the last 20 years as the demand of this particular fruit has

increased for its unique taste, he said.

The variety is a blessing for the farmers of Rangpur, he said.

Despite a good yield last year, the farmer did not get a better price of Haribhanga mango just for the prevailing coronavirus pandemic. This year, the growers are also worried to get a fair price of their produce. The marketing of the fruit is badly affected for the pandemic situation due to transport constraint.

The farmers demanded that the government introduce a special train for transportation of Haribhanga from Rangpur.

The farmers also demanded that the infrastructure of Podaganj Haat be developed, where the seasonal fruit is produced for sale.

Shahjahan Mia of Tekani village said he has been growing Haribhanga on 48 decimals of land for the last ten years and he is expecting a good production this year.

Nazrul Islam, another mango grower of Akhiraht village in Mithapukur Upazila, said that many local educated unemployed youths have got engaged in mango production.

Abdus Salam of Akhiraht village said he has been producing Haribhanga variety since 1992. Initially, he started cultivation in a nascent area. Now, he is the owner of 25 more extensive orchards in the Upazila. Agronomist Masudur Rahman, the additional deputy Director of DAE in Rangpur, said that the area of Haribhanga cultivation is increasing in Rangpur every year as the farmers are making a good profit. "It requires less labour, pesticide and investment", he said.

Steps will be taken to ease the marketing hassle of Haribhanga mango in the district, said Asib Ahsan, the Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur.

According to the locals, late Nafal Uddin Paikar of Tekani village in Mithapukur Upazila of Rangpur was the pioneer of the Haribhanga mango cultivation around 62 years ago.

The mother tree of Haribhanga mango is still alive.

Locals of the area demanded the local administration to protect the mother tree, which is now a part of the heritage in the district.

Another bridge collapses in Barguna's Amtali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Just two days after this paper ran a report on seven extremely damaged bridges, in four unions of Barguna's Amtali upazila, another bridge on Chawra canal in Mohishdanga area collapsed last Friday.

Headlined "Seven deadly bridges in four unions", the report was published in The Daily Star on June 23.

Constructed on iron infrastructure in 2002, the bridge was a vital means of everyday communications for at least 25,000 inhabitants of six villages.

According to Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) office in Amtali, the bridge was built at the cost of Tk 1 crore to connect Amtali and Chawra unions.

Amtali upazila LGED Engineer Abdullah Al Mamun said, "I've received news that the bridge has collapsed. In place of the iron bridge, a girder bridge will be built. This has prompted us to seek funding [for the construction of a new bridge]. Work will begin as soon as the fund is allocated."

The bridge was badly damaged in the middle of last month. It completely collapsed on Friday evening while a battery-run auto-rickshaw was crossing it, said locals.

Maulana Anwar Hossain, superintendent of Alhaj Md Shamim Ahsan Dakhil Madrasa of Mohishdanga village, said after the bridge collapsed, one now has to take a long detour to reach Amtali upazila headquarters.

Amtali Union Parishad Chairman Motahar Uddin Mridha said the bridge needs to be rebuilt quickly as nearly 25,000 people in six villages have been suffering after it collapsed.



The bridge on Chawra canal, in Mohishdanga area of Barguna's Amtali upazila, collapsed on June 25.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Unlocking the potential of youth

Proper training and access to finance are key

TASNIM ODRIKA

Youth are a significant part of the total population in Bangladesh. A country's development depends on its skilled youth group. The government is providing some training and loan facilities. But these are far from enough.

Emphasis should be placed on providing timely training to the youth and necessary steps have to be taken to increase the quality of the training provided to them. Along with that, there must be facilities for arranging adequate loans to the youth after the end of the training sessions. These loans must be provided on easy terms with low interest and minimum collateral. The government must also increase the amount of the loan.

These recommendations were shared by participants in a session titled "Youth employment (training and loan facilities)". The session was a part of a daylong event jointly organised by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Oxfam in Bangladesh on March 11, 2021 with the support from European Union (EU).

Mohammed Mosharraf Hossain, a community volunteer from Netrokona, and Halimatun Sadiya, a member of Youth Group from Rowmari, Kurigram, gave a presentation at the session. The presentation referred to a study that was carried out with the data from various government and non-government organisations.

The study revealed that 77 per cent of the youth respondents receiving training from various government institutions had not been able to arrange any employment after the training. They also didn't get any information as to employment opportunities.

37 per cent of the respondents said that the trainings provided were not up to the standard. Furthermore, as to the loan amount, 50 per cent of the borrowers said that the amount of loan they received was less than their demand.

The local service providers,



according to the participants, must play an effective role to ensure youth employment as well. They should make yearly plans for youth employment in consultation with local young people. The service providers also need to identify the challenges faced by young people to improve their capacity and to create adequate access to government services.

"We cannot deny the lacking in our service delivery, political participation, and democracy. We want to ensure that our resources are used wisely. If the government just spends money in a haphazard way without any proper way to track the results, there will not be any proper development for our youths. There are various developmental organisations at the local government level but there isn't proper coordination among them and it seems like they spend the money and their budget only for the sake of using them instead for actual developmental agendas," said Rokeya Kabir, special guest of the session and Executive Director and Founder of Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha (BNPS).

The participants urged the local service providers to institutionalise the Citizen-led Social Audit to ensure quality services in a transparent and accountable manner. The Citizen-led Social Audit and community engagement can be effective tools for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and

Vision 2041 of the Bangladesh Government, they opined.

"Social audit is a very important part of social accountability. Along with social accountability, the need for parallel and downward accountability is equally essential in order to bring sustainable results," highlighted Badiul Alam Majumdar, Country Director of The Hunger Project - Bangladesh and the chairperson of the session.

Oxfam, in partnership with CPD, has been implementing a project titled 'Enhancing the Participation of Community-Based Organisations (CBO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Democratic Governance in Bangladesh' in thirteen districts of the country with the support from the European Union.

The project strengthens the knowledge and leadership capacities of grassroots CBOs and CSOs regarding social accountability tools such as citizen-led social audit. The project is aimed at providing improved services at the local level by increasing transparency and accountability. In order to ensure social accountability, the project is using a social audit tool.

The main purpose of social audit is to contribute to the enhancement of government accountability by incorporating the views of citizens and public organisations. In addition, it provides an opportunity for civil and public organisations to observe and respond to public service activities in a participatory manner.

Plight of the haor people

Local projects failing to improve their livelihoods

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

The struggles of the people living in the haor areas of the country's north-eastern districts came to light during the early flash floods of 2017.

Triggered by heavy rainfall, these flash floods caused a disastrous situation for more than eight lakh families living in six districts of the haor area. Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the problem.

Department of Bangladesh Haor and Wetlands Development (DBHWD) has taken several projects to improve the lives and livelihood of the marginalised people of the haor region. However, these projects are failing to achieve their goal due to lack of transportation, proper communication, access to information and, the inclusion of community members in the planning and implementation process.

The master plan for haor areas, prepared by DBHWD in 2012, focuses on developing water resources, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, transportation, social services, and industry. This plan also includes 36 critical projects for haor areas, some already completed and some currently being implemented.

However, the DBHWD does not have proper monitoring and evaluation tools to understand the impact of these initiatives on the lives of the intended beneficiaries.

"Some projects have been completed, but no impact assessment has been conducted. Once all the projects from the 'Master Plan' are completed, we will initiate a detailed assessment which will help upgrade the plan and set a baseline for future projects," said Dr Ali Muhammad Omar Faruque, Director of Agriculture, Water & Environment at DBHWD.

Community engagement is crucial to address this gap, opined Towfiqul Islam Khan, Senior Research Fellow of CPD.

"Without key insight from the local perspective, a top-down approach will rarely succeed in producing long-term sustainable development. This is why citizen-led social audits and public hearings for local development projects are highly successful. They allow communities to take ownership of the projects being implemented

and ensure accountability from these projects. Citizen-led audits should be institutionalised at the local government level to ensure that initiatives put in place for farmers and fishers are actually being implemented for their betterment and not just being exploited by influential middlemen," he added.

Lack of accessibility is another major barrier for the haor people. This include a lack of awareness among farmers and fishers regarding government services, lack of direct communication with key officials, lack of human resources in service sectors, inadequate training, unavailability of farm materials and equipment and lack of access to agriculture loans.

Due to the unique geographical structure, around 83 per cent of the people in Sunamganj depend directly and indirectly on agriculture

Towfiqul Islam Khan said, "Three issues must be considered to maintain accountability in government projects and services meant for the haor people.

"Firstly, projects and services must be tailor-made for farmers and fishers of the haor. Secondly, service coverage must reach all sectors—agriculture, health, education, etc.—and lastly, general people must be involved in the implementation of the service delivery."

He further suggested, "Union Digital Centres should be better utilised to allow local people to access various information and public services."

The DAE also suffers from a lack of human resources, as 93 sub-assistant agriculture officers are currently working in Sunamganj, even though a total of 263 positions are available. The DAE officials also suggest



PHOTO: DWOHA CHOWDHURY

and fishing. Yet, this district suffers the most due to accessibility issues.

"Farmers are rarely getting training from government projects. Most of the time, they are getting training from projects which are not directly related to their field of work," said Faridul Hasan, Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Sunamganj.

"However," he continued, "we are trying to monitor and ensure fertiliser distributors are making sales at government-subsidised rates in each union. But many important types of machinery required for farming are still unavailable for these farmers."

that the government build more submersible roads in the haor, which will significantly help solve the accessibility issue.

Somehow, even against these unfavourable odds, farmers of Sunamganj have excelled in Boro production and exceeded the target of 885,229 tonne rice production this year.

However, they rarely get a fair price for their harvest.

Nakib Saad Saiful Islam, the District Controller of food in Sunamganj, said, "The price of paddy in the market is still lower than the government rate of Tk 27 per kg."