

Role of Television in Farmer's Empowerment of Bangladesh: A Case Study on Hridoye Mati O Manush

Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Shafiul Islam¹

Abstract

Bangladesh economy largely depends on agriculture since 53 percent families directly depend on the sector. Adequate flow of information is a pre-requisite for the development of agriculture where Television (TV) can play pivotal role. The farmers of Bangladesh mostly deprived of formal education can easily understand the messages of television delivered in audio-visual format. The first ever agricultural programme 'Mati O Manush (Land and People)' was initiated by the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) in 1980s. Later, Channel i, one of the leading satellite television channels launched Hridoye Mati O Manush (Land and People in Heart) in 2004. These programmes are perceived as revolutionary in agricultural transformation of the country though there is dearth of empirical study on this. The research article derived from a doctoral study undertaking audience survey, Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and Content Analysis examined if the said programmes contributed to the farmers' empowerment at different levels. The study reveals, 97 percent farmers got agricultural information from the programme of which more than three-fourths adopted the information in their agricultural practices. About 94 percent adopters got benefits while 69.6 percent's agricultural behavior was positively changed. The 'Agricultural Budget' series facilitated the farmers to interact face-to-face with the senior government officials and the policy makers. Such dialogue created a sense of empowerment among the farmers and an atmosphere of bottom-up approach in annual budgetary process where the farmer's voice was reflected. However, the farmers are yet to be organized like India to form a national non-political platform to bargain their issues and influence national agricultural policies.

Keywords: Agriculture, development, empowerment, farmers, information

Introduction

Agriculture is the lifeline of Bangladesh economy despite gradual decline in its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Bangladesh is endowed with a favourable climate for cultivation of a wide variety of both tropical and temperate crops where about 100 different kinds of crops are grown. Rice is the principal one which grows in all the three-crop seasons of a year and covers almost 79 percent of the total cropped land. There is a continuous transformation of agricultural production from its single crop to multiple cropping systems in the country. Profitable,

¹Professor & Chairperson, Dept. of Journalism and Media Communication, Green University of Bangladesh

sustainable and environment friendly agricultural system is indispensable to attain food security for the ever-growing population of the country. Despite gradual shifting to industrial activities, multi-dimensional agricultural activities are still facilitating economic growth of Bangladesh. Like other sectors, agriculture needs effective information flow on improved varieties of seeds, environment friendly fertilizers and pesticides; profitable and new varieties of agro-products and its sub-sectors like poultry raising, livestock rearing, fisheries, fruits cultivation; market information; cost effectiveness of the agro-products; consultation and suggestions with experts and other pertinent information.

Television (TV) is a powerful electronic mass medium having power to reach the remotest area with necessary information, education, entertainment and persuasion. In the perspective of Bangladesh, TV is an effective medium of communication and very useful to the 36.4 percent people (AIS: 2017) who are deprived of education. As the TV messages are delivered with visual pictures, conversations and music, they are easily communicative and understandable to the people even who can't read or write. As an effective mass media, TV has indispensable role to approach the farmers with necessary and accurate information on various aspects of agricultural practices. TV is significant for the farmers for its nature of audio and visual presentation of content which is even understandable to a large segment of people in general having poor or no educational background.

One of the remarkable scenarios in Bangladesh agriculture is that a declining trend is observed for the total agricultural lands of the country, i.e. a decrease is noted from 91.83% in 1976 to 87.69% and 83.53% over the years of 2000 and 2010 respectively. A total of 561,380 ha agricultural lands were decreased during 1976-2000 and this figure was increased to 565,370 ha during 2000-2010. Yearly average loss of agriculture lands were 23,391 ha and 56,537 ha during 1976-2000 and 2000-2010 respectively (Hasan et.al. 2013, p. 3). On the other hand, total population turned into more than double, from 75 million in 1972 to more than 164 million at present. Comparing to the rapid increasing of population and speedy declining agricultural land, the production of agriculture particularly the food grains has increased several folds. In this transition, dissemination of agricultural information to the farmers is thought one of the prime change makers. Especially to the farmers having no formal educational background, audio-visual transmission of useful agricultural information by television channels has a great perceived impact.

Beginning of TV Programme on Agriculture in Bangladesh

Shykh Seraj initiated his programme *Mati O Manush* (MOM) on Bangla

desh Television (BTV) shortly after its inception. In the initial stage (in 1980) the title of the programme was Amar Desh (my country) which was turned into a mainstream programme of BTV gradually. Challenging the entertainment-based programmes of BTV, specially designed for the urban elites, Seraj developed a completely different stream of television programme targeting the farmers. After launching, the programme became popular not only among the farmers but also among the mass audiences. In a short span of time, it was regarded as one of the mainstream programmes of the television. Gradually, the programme leapfrogs the other contemporary programmes of the television which created universal appeal (Chandrabati Academy: 2012). As a result of the programme, agriculture has been recognized as a significant content of the media. Seraj continued the programme in BTV till 1996 undertaking 588 episodes.

Later, he left BTV but has been continuously producing the similar programme with a little different title Hridoye Mati O Manush (Land and People in Heart) for one of the country's most popular satellite TV channels, the Channel i since 2004. The programme, being a revised version of the earlier one, has been covering multidimensional agricultural activities –from rooftop and vase gardening to commercial agriculture, agricultural marketing and value chain both in domestic and international markets, food security, addressing of climate change, agricultural policy, foreign agriculture, farmer's empowerment, entertainment and agricultural heritage of Bangladesh. Through disseminating information and education on expansion of the agro-technologies and innovation of new crop varieties, the programme has minimized the gap between the farmers and the laboratories of the agricultural researchers and scientists (Bhuiyan et.al. 2016, p.169). Seraj introduced three new programmes: Hridoye Mati O Manush (Land and People in Heart) and Hridoye Mati O Manusher Daak (The Appeal of Land and People in Heart) on Channel i and Krishi Dibanishi (Agriculture: Round the Clock) on the state run terrestrial channel, BTV again.

About the outcomes of the Seraj's TV documentary 'Land and People' on BTV and 'Land and People in Heart' on Channel i, Bhuiyan et.al. (2016) argued that during the 1990s, the agricultural programme contributed to inclusive expansion of crops cultivation, fishery and poultry raising commercially. Alam et al. (2012, p. 64) stated that Shykh Seraj focused on different aspects of food security, agricultural innovations, crops marketing system, foreign agriculture, impact of climate change on agriculture and many other issues in his programme. He challenged the traditional concept of a farmer meaning that only the rural people were suitable for agricultural productions. Conversely, his documentary encouraged many young educated people, housewives and university students to participate in agricultural activities. This programme has created interests among the agricultural extension

researchers of Bangladesh too. Scientific officer of BARI (Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute), Rahman (et al. 2016) mentioned, "Channel i (a private TV channel) is the pioneer with prominent, regular agricultural programmes like Hridoye Mati O Manush and agricultural news".

On different occasions Seraj produced several other programmes under the concept of Hridoye Mati O Manush (HMOM) which includes: Krishoker Eid Anando (Farmers' Eid Delight), Krishoker Boishakhi Anando (Farmers' Boishakhi Delight), Krishoker Bishwa Cup (Farmers' World Cup), Krishi Budget, Krishoker Budget (Agricultural Budget, Farmer's Budget), and Firey Cholo Matir Taney (Return to the Roots). These programmes, unique in nature, are generally perceived beneficial to the farmers in addressing their information, education and entertainment needs. These programmes introduced the farmers with diversified agricultural practices, successes in agricultural practices, innovations and use of modern technologies in agriculture.

Following these programmes, some other television channels are producing programmes and news on agriculture. Newspapers in the country are also showing interest to cover agricultural news. The agricultural documentary of Seraj has generated interest among the domestic and foreign policy makers, diplomats, researchers and agricultural experts. Their frequent visit to the Channel i and sharing experiences with Seraj and his team are the evidences of their enthusiasm. As recognition, he bagged a number of national and international prestigious awards and fellowships including the Bangladesh government's highest recognitions.

Rationale of the Study

The Hridoye Mati O Manush (HMOM) programme is such an agricultural documentary which has been contributing to the diversification and sustainable agricultural development of the country according to the development workers, agricultural experts, farmer's leaders, journalists, writers, academics and researchers. Alam (2014) opines that the contribution of Shykh Seraj's agricultural programme in commercial expansion of high yielding crops, pisciculture and poultry farming will remain forever.

However, academic research on the role of media in sustainable agricultural development is inadequate comparing to the needs and growth of this sector in Bangladesh. Professor Golam Rahman (1999), a development communication specialist, felt the need of an impact study of the 'Land and People' programme due to its perceived popularity among the audience of both the urban and rural areas. But, a little has been done to understand the impact of the TV programme on

agricultural expansion and development—how the information, education and entertainment needs of the farmers were addressed and how the farmers were influenced by the programme designed, produced and presented by Seraj. Consequently, Mass-line Media Centre (MMC), a national NGO working on communication, journalism and development fields, undertook a study and held workshop with the media experts, civil society members, agriculture and the development activists to understand the impact of the programme *Mati o Manush* of BTV in 2002. The study flagged academic approach – the methodology did not consider the perspectives of the farmers though the focus of the study was to figure out impact of the programme on agriculture and the farmers. Moreover, there was dearth of comprehensive studies on HMOM programme to understand its impact in farmers' empowerment from their own viewpoints.

The present study attempted to bridge that gap by exploring the impact of the TV programmes on Bangladesh agriculture in the perception of the farmers with particular focus on HMOM. From the scholastic viewpoint of the role of TV in agricultural development, the study is significant to contribute to the development and integration of empirical knowledge on the mentioned subject.

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Significance of information dissemination in the field of agriculture has been traditionally recognized. In the early stage of communication and development studies, the researchers found a strong connection between the appropriate agricultural information and agro-production. Researchers argued that the better informed farmers could produce better crops than those of the less informed ones. In the process of adopting right agricultural decision, techniques of choosing and producing suitable crop as per the quality of soil and environment, cost-effective harvesting techniques, storage of agro-products and their proper marketing; farmers need accurate information. Hornik (1988) states, "Changes in material inputs, complementary farming techniques, storage technology, and research, supply, and marketing institutions are all part of the technological transformation. The effective integration of these factors, it is argued, is tied closely to adequate information flows (p. 29)."

Agboola (2000) argues that information plays a key role in agricultural development and production and their effective communication facilitate mutual understanding among farmers, agricultural scientist and extension workers. According to Kaye (1995) good information improves decision-making, enhances efficiency and provides a competitive edge. Knowledge and information are basic ingredients for increased agricultural production and productivity.

Information is a critical resource in the operation and management of the agricultural enterprise. Opara (2008) finds that besides agricultural extension workers, news media, particularly the audio-visual media play as the significant source of information for the farmers. Abbas et al. (2008) argued that lack of information adapted to local needs and lack of technical knowledge at farm level are the important factors responsible for low yield. Information is therefore considered as one of the most important resources in agricultural and rural development that assists the farmers to take decisions and appropriate actions for further development related to farming (Alam et al., 2014, cited from Harris et al., 2001; Morrow et al., 2002 and Stefano et al., 2005).

It is thought that television can support the farmers to achieve the target of the better living through diffusing information on different aspects of agriculture. Agricultural programmes of television can focus on the cultivation of seasonal crops, vegetables, fruits, etc. suitable for the particular areas. Selection of right seeds and plantation system for the particular type of soil and environment, use of fertilizer, pesticides, agricultural innovation, natural methods of pest control and management are also important factors in farming of which information are very useful to the farmers. Besides, information on marketing of the agricultural products needs to reach the farmers so that they can get appropriate value of their products.

Mass media approaches in disseminating agricultural information are useful to reach a wider audience rapidly. They are useful as sources of agricultural information to farmers and as well constitute methods of notifying farmers of new developments and emergencies. They could equally be important in stimulating farmers' interest in new ideas and practices (Ani et al. 1997). Radio and television are the most effective tools in communication for the support of development (Hussain, 1997). TV can provide an illiterate person valuable instruction and education in agriculture, health population control, sanitation and other aspect of daily life (Rahman, 1999).

Alam et al. (2014) argues in their study 'Contribution of Television Channels in Disseminating Agricultural Information for the Agricultural Development of Bangladesh: A Case Study' that adoption of knowledge and information from the TV channels facilitated production of 91.67 percent farmers of three villages namely Hariapara, Amgachi and Gowrihar in Durgapur Thana of Rajshahi District. The contribution of Shykh Seraj's agricultural programme in commercial expansion of high yielding crops, pisciculture and poultry farms will remain forever (Alam: 2014). Seraj has bridged the gap between the empirical knowledge of the agriculturists and the farmers of the country.

Gupta and Ferdous (2010: p. 122) state that Seraj's programmes on agriculture encouraged many people, even from the well-off classes towards carrying out some sorts of agricultural activities they viewed. Akter & Kabir (2011) perceive that Hridoye Mati-O-Manush is rated most popular program in Bangladesh in terms of content, design and presentation (p.41). According to them, the programmes planned, produced and presented by Shykh Seraj try to bring the concerns of farmers and agricultural challenges to the notice of the policy makers and others who matter in agriculture. These programs also reflect the ideas of researchers, extension department and policy makers regarding the increasing population, and forthcoming food demand, specifically in the least-developed and developing countries (ibid, p.45).

Professor Golam Rahman (1999) observes that, though some of the TV channels have initiated agricultural programmes following Seraj; dearth of understanding and inappropriate attitude towards producing the agricultural programmes is noticed among those channels where the dominance of the experts is visible with less participation of the farmers. According to him, Seraj's uniqueness of the programme production is to give more emphasis on the farmer's participation in the programme rather than the experts.

Katalyst, an international development organization working in the agricultural sector development in Bangladesh, jointly conducted a study with Agricultural Information Services (AIS), a government body in 2012. The study revealed that 54 percent farmers received agricultural information from the television where the name of HMOM was uttered with importance. Islam (2015) in his doctoral research states that Hridoye Mati O Manush has been one of the most popular agro-based programmes on the contemporary agro-economics and development. He has considered the programme of Channel i as one of the highest contributors in the agricultural development sector (p. 75-76).

In the doctoral study titled, 'Farm Programmes of Electronic Media: A Comparative Study of Audience Perception in Kerala', researcher Thomas (2010) found that the farmers of Kerala preferred success stories of the farmers in the farm programmes of the electronic media. The farmers thought the success stories encouraging for the people to go for farming and they opined that such stories were good sources of inspiration. However, the farmers emphasized on the entertainment factors even in farm programmes.

Chhachhar et.al. (2014) conducted a study titled 'Role of Television in Agriculture Development of Sindh, Pakistan' where they found that 97.5 percent respon

dents perceived the television as the best source for agricultural-related information. According to 86 percent respondents, television programmes were effective in increasing agricultural income of the farmers in Sindh.

Khan (2014) conducted a study on the urban audiences of HMOM programme where she found that the urban audiences of the programme are positively influenced for their knowledge of agriculture. Thus, HMOM has a strong impact on its audience for increasing awareness about Bangladeshi agriculture, challenges and successes.

The aforesaid studies had their own focuses, uses, benefits and limitations. These studies provide different aspects of media and development researches in Bangladesh and other countries. The explanations and narratives on the HMOM programme have been mostly drawn based on the observations, assumptions and perceptions of the researchers themselves. One of the major gaps in those studies and research-based articles is that they did not capture the farmer's perception on the impact of HMOM in their empowerment though the farmers are the prime target audiences of the programme. In this context, the present study has solely focused on the perceived impact of HMOM in farmer's empowerment by capturing their views, statements, experiences and the perception.

Theoretical Underpinning: For human development, some experts think of the importance of empowerment, an approach in which it is believed that the marginalized, excluded and the underprivileged people need to be empowered for their socio-economic, cultural, political and above all spiritual development. The term 'empowerment' comes from the word 'power'. So, before discussing on empowerment, we should understand what power means. Rawlands, a renowned feminist activist and development expert, in her book 'Questioning Empowerment (1997)', outlined different meanings of power at various levels. She argues that power can take the forms of 'power over' as controlling power; 'power to' as productive power; 'power with' as collective power with a group; and 'power from within' as self-acceptance and self-respect (p.13). So, this has constructed the theoretical underpinning of this article. Relevant findings from the study will focus how the programme contributed to the empowerment of the farmers in the light of this model.

Objective

The overall objective of the article has been based on the aforesaid thoughts of Rawlands to understand how the said TV programmes contributed to empowering the farmers of Bangladesh.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study include to:

- a. Recognize 'power from within' as self-acceptance and self-respect of the farmers
- b. Comprehend 'power to' as productive power of the farmers
- c. Understand 'power with' as collective power with a group, and
- d. Figure out 'power over' as controlling power of the farmers

Methodology of the Study

The issue of the empowerment was figured out from the views, statements, experiences and perception of the farmers, the primary target audiences of the programme. Due to the nature of a perception study, methodologists have extensively suggested for adopting the approaches of gathering both the qualitative and quantitative data. Keeping this in mind, the study has incorporated a few methods for gathering both the quantitative and qualitative data from the primary and secondary sources. In order to gather data from the primary sources, questionnaire survey on the HMOM audiences, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) were carried out. For gathering data from the secondary sources, content analysis of the selected episodes of HMOM programme was conducted and relevant literatures were reviewed as and where necessary.

Major Research Questions

Aligned with the objectives of the study, following key research questions formed the base of investigation:

- a. To what extent did the farmers get information and benefits from the information disseminated by the programme? Did it stimulate their feelings like 'power from within' as self-acceptance and self-respect of the farmers in the family as well as in the community?
- b. Did the information help them in their production and knowledge level that correspond to 'power to' as productive power of the farmers?
- c. Did the programme stimulate the farmer's cooperatives that resembles 'power with' as collective power with a group?
- d. Did the framers gain ability like 'power over' as controlling power, especially on national level policies?

Primary Data: Sources and Planning

Audience Survey: Based on standard statistical determination of sample size

suggested by Malhotra & Dash (2016, p.376), a total of 425 farmers having exposure to the programme underwent the audience survey from 14 villages of seven divisions in the country, each covering 02 villages – one transitional and the other traditional in nature. In the survey, village was considered as primary sampling unit (PSU) selected from the district of the respective division. One district from each of the divisions has been taken for the study. From Chittagong division, both Chittagong and Bandarban Districts were selected. From Chittagong district, a transitional village was selected while a traditional village was selected from Bandarban District. The reason behind selecting two districts from Chittagong division was that the division possesses characteristics of both the hilly and the plain land. In order to capture perception of the farmers living in the hilly portion of the aforesaid division, a village was selected from Bandarban, one of the hilly districts of Chittagong. In all the 07 transitional villages, the number of the respondents was 212 while the number was 213 for the 07 traditional ones. The distribution of the survey respondents shows that the share of the sample population from the selected transitional and traditional villages was equal. For distribution of the samples per village, an 'equal allocation procedure' was applied while for selecting individual respondent, every fifth house-hold (HH) was selected (Table 3.1).



Figure 1- Location of the selected districts (green marked)

Table 1- Respondents as per Transitional and Traditional Villages

Division	District	Name of the Village	Type	No. of Samples
Sylhet	Hobiganj	Kalikapur	Transitional	31
		Baghasura	Traditional	31
Dhaka	Tangail	Dakshminpara	Transitional	31
		Kalia	Traditional	32
Rangpur	Dinajpur	Kalikapur	Transitional	30
		Sundarban	Traditional	30
Khulna	Bagerhat	Mulghar (Uttarpara)	Transitional	30
		Kakdanga	Traditional	30
Rajshahi	Natore	Rampur	Transitional	30
		Sankarbhag	Traditional	30
Chittagong	Chittagong & Bandarban	Maizpatty (Fatehpur)	Transitional	30
		Suwalok	Traditional	30
Barisal	Patuakhali	Uttar (North) Muradia	Transitional	30
		Joar Gorobdi Char	Traditional	30
Total (Transitional 212 + Traditional 213)				425

For selecting the districts from the divisions, following factors were considered:

- a. Topographical diversity: the plain land, haor, hilly and coastal district
- b. Distance from the divisional headquarter
- c. Time and budget

Selection of the PSU: It was mentioned earlier that the PSU in this study indicates the ‘village’ selected from the sample districts. From each of the district, two villages were selected of which one was ‘Transitional’ and other was ‘Traditional’ in nature. In defining the villages, some features have been considered from the study of Daniel Lerner (1958), YVL Rao (1966) and Golam Rahman (1999) that included: status of electrification, state of literacy rate and income of the villagers and availability of satellite channels, state of social infrastructure (i.e. roads, schools, post offices, bazar) and distance from the district headquarter.

Qualitative Approaches:

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) & Key Informant Interviews (KII)

With a view to capturing statements, opinions and overall perception of the farmers in qualitative manner a total of 16 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held in the survey areas undergoing the study. Out of these, seven FGDs were held

in the transitional villages and the remaining nine were held in the traditional villages. Considering sex of the respondents, six were held with the female participants while 10 were held with the male respondents. A total of 174 respondents took part in the FGDs of which 117 were the male and the remaining 57 were the female respondents. While selecting the FGD respondents, age, sex, educational qualification, income and occupation were considered. The FGD respondents had no chance to take part in the questionnaire survey.

Table 2- Distribution of number of FGDs and participants

Type of Village	Male No. of FGD (No. of Participants)	Female No. of FGD (No. of Participants)	Total No. of FGD (No. of Participants)
Transitional	3 (35)	4 (39)	7 (74)
Traditional	7 (82)	2 (18)	9 (100)
Total	10 (117)	6 (57)	16 (174)

A total of 35 Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with the agriculturist, media expert, development activist, agriculture extension expert, media academic and researchers, farmer's leader, senior journalist, relevant government official, better informed farmers and opinion leaders, HMOM planner, producer and presenter as well as the senior team members. A detailed checklist and guideline was developed to conduct the interviews.

Secondary Data

Literature Review: Relevant literature and documents on the role of media in agricultural development, media effects, and communication and development perspectives were collected and reviewed accordingly. The literature ideally contained academic books, research reports, thesis, journal articles, media articles and reports, diary, government laws and policies and other relevant publications.

Content Analysis: A total of 26 episodes from the diverse areas of programmes were analyzed through sampling to understand the nature and focus of HMOM.

Discussion of Findings

The findings have been put in this section against all the four specific areas of empowerment with short titles based on the original thesis. For the convenience, findings have been presented briefly with considering the word limitation of the article.

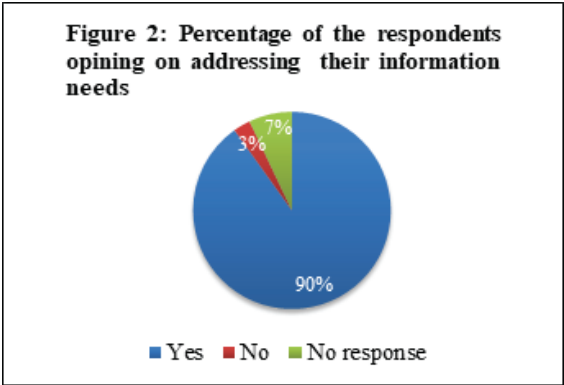
a. Access to information, learning, knowledge and getting benefits: 'power from within'

The issues of self-acceptance and self-respect of the farmers in the family as well as in the community are related to their level of information, learning and knowledge. All these facilitate farmers' ability that ultimately contribute to creating their self-value. The audience survey reveals that, 97 percent farmers reportedly got necessary agricultural information from HMOM programme and 94 percent farmers learned about different aspects of agriculture.

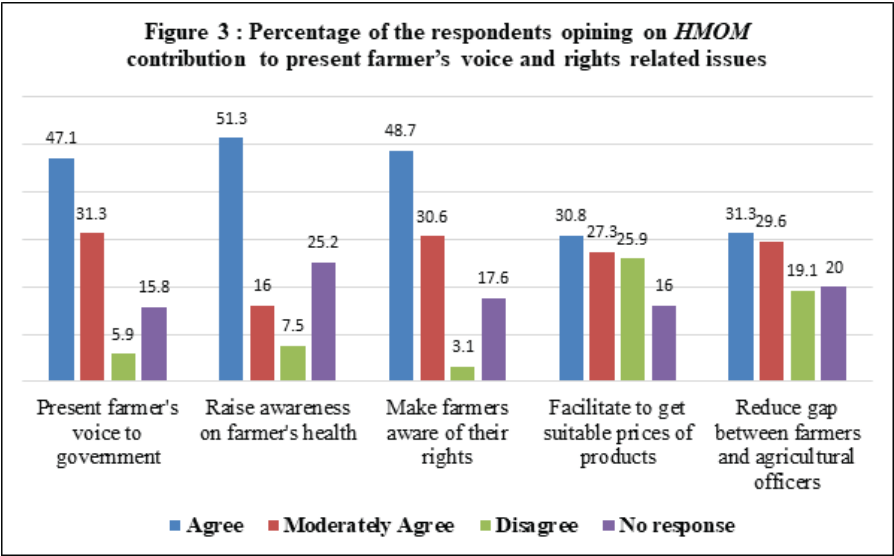
About 'learning from the programme', the respondents gave multiple responses in open-ended manner. The first answer about their learning was considered and a total 21 subjects of learning from HMOM came out. The top ten subjects of learning included: techniques of cultivating food grains (i.e. paddy, wheat, maize etc.) by 18 percent respondents; techniques of rearing live assets (poultry and cattle) by 6 percent, fish cultivation by 5.6 percent, fruits production techniques i.e. strawberry, Kazi peyara (guava), mango, litchi, dragon fruits, coconut etc.) by 5.5 percent, vegetables cultivation techniques by 5 percent; nursery and tree plantation by 4.6 percent, combined system of agriculture by 4.5 percent, controlling of pests in natural way by 4 percent, new agricultural equipment and technology by 3.5 percent, and techniques of producing and using bio-fertilizers by 3.5 percent respondents which included 60 percent of the respondents. Of the remaining 40 percent responses, 33.4 percent included the subjects of learning on irrigation systems, jute cultivation techniques, value of farmer's opinion in the national budget, farmer's health care, techniques of foreign agricultural activities, multi-dimensional agriculture and its benefits, crop markets, innovative agricultural activities, disaster resilient crop, preservation and use of seeds, jhum farming, honey cultivation, cooperative farming, flowers' cultivation, crops season and rotation. Some of the farmers, 6.6 percent, did not response on the same.

Nine among ten farmers told their information needs on various aspects of agriculture were fulfilled from the programme

The programme contributed to creating awareness on the farmer's health issues, more than half of the respondents agreed while 16 percent moderately agreed on that.

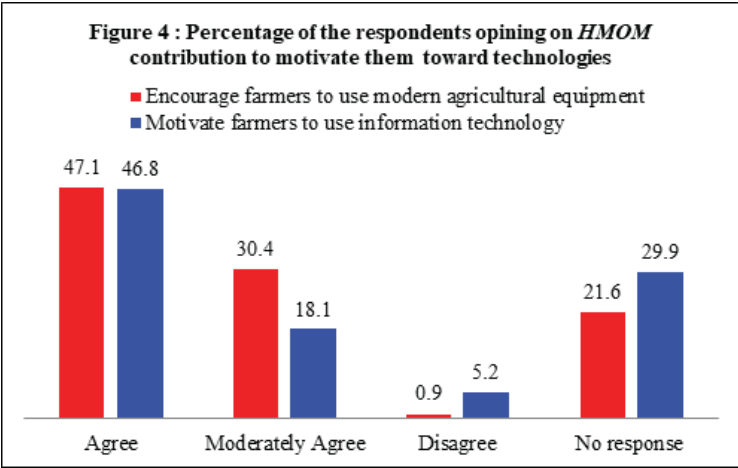


Of the respondents about 49 percent agreed that the programme made the farmers aware of their citizen rights while more than 30 percent moderately agreed on the same. Of the respondents 47 percent agreed that the programme contributed to encouraging the farmers to use modern agricultural equipment and motivating them to adopt ICT (information and communication technology).



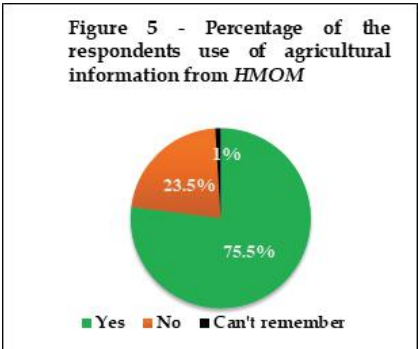
However, more than 30 percent respondents moderately agreed on the farmer's use of modern agricultural equipment and 18 percent moderately agreed on the use of ICT. The programme imparted reports on the use of drum seeder, bio-gas plant, paddy-harvester and other technologies used in the fields of agriculture. Some experiences of the use of these machines in the foreign agriculture were presented. Apart from these, the farmers were facilitated to use information technology, particularly internet. For example, the farmers were suggested to visit

union information centre and use internet for seeking information on agriculture. The programme covered reports on ‘info lady’ which was motivating for many young farmers. In some of the episodes of the ‘Farmer’s Budget’ programme, use of ICT in the promotion of agricultural activities has been emphasized. Of the respondents, about 30 percent didn’t not know about programmes contribution to facilitating the farmers to use modern agricultural equipment while more than 21 percent didn’t know about the contribution to motivating the farmers to use ICT. All these ways of information transformation improved the farmer’s information and knowledge base that facilitated their confidence and inner strengths.



b. Using agricultural information and getting benefits: ‘productive power’

The study examines whether the programme has contributed to the productive power of the farmers. The survey shows more than three-fourths, 75.5% of the respondents (N=321) used agricultural information availed from the programme of which 93.7 percent got benefits. Among the benefits, their knowledges level and information base increased which facilitated to accelerate agricultural productions. About 31 percent respondents agreed that the programme facilitated them to get suitable prices of their products while 37 percent moderately agreed on the issue. Twenty six percent respondents disagreed on the issue while 16 percent didn’t know about the same.



With the price of increased products, many farmers were able to transform their lives in a number of ways—sending their children to schools, taking care of their health, food and nutrition as revealed from the FGDs.

c. Understanding 'power with' as the members of cooperatives

The study reveals that the farmers engaged in cooperative farming were benefited. They adopted decisions regarding fish cultivations and cooperative schemes like irrigations together and 'got good productions' in their opinion. The success stories of farmer's cooperatives portrayed by the programme motivated the fellow farmers in adopting such efforts. The programme contributed to presenting the farmer's voices to the government in the opinion of three-fourth of the respondents. From the viewpoint of social responsibility, mass media should reflect the people's voice to the government and at the same time government's planning, decisions and directives should be communicated with people. It is a two-way process of communication through mass media. The programme contributed to that, particularly presenting the farmer's voices regarding the agricultural budget to the government, and, at the same time, the programme imparted information on the government's activities and decisions about the affairs and issues of the agriculture and the farmers. The programme contributed to reducing the gap between the relevant government officials and the farmers since 31 percent agreed and 30 percent moderately agreed on the same. One-fifth percent of the respondents didn't know about the issue while 19 percent disagreed on the same.

d. Gaining 'power over'

Gaining ability to 'power over' is related to influencing the policy level and bargain capacity at national level. According to the FGD participants and KII respondents, including the programme designer and the presenter; the farmers of the country lagged behind to form a national platform to campaign for the favourable agriculture policies and strategies. This relates with the 'power over' as controlling power on the national policy makers. For example, the farmers in general have no mentionable control over the price of their products, agricultural policies, budgetary allocations and greater welfare for the communities.

Analysis of the Findings

The information, knowledge and learnings of the farmers from the programme, according to the FGD and KII findings, capacitated them to take right decision of agricultural activities i.e. selection of suitable lands for specific type of crops in befitting manner, understanding of the cultivation system of different crops in various seasons, preparation of bio-fertilizers and integrated pest management system, high yielding and high valued crops, integrated agriculture system etc.

Their improved knowledge contributed to producing more crops and bagging more money that has provided them with an identity of successful farmers. These have brought about honour in the family as well as in the community since their importance as the 'star farmers' increased among their fellows.

The FGD findings show that the farmers' know-hows on nurturing of the crops, rooftop framing, prevention of harmful insects, production of crops at low cost, linkage with market and getting more price, cooperative farming, producing of environment friendly organic fertilizers etc. have increased in various parts of the country especially in Tangail, Natore, Bagerhat, Hobiganj, Bandarban. Being motivated by the programme, many farmers were involved in cooperative agricultural activities like fish cultivation in the lake, irrigation in groups and so on. Such activities strengthened existing cooperation among the fellow farmers.

According to the farmers taking part in FGDs, the 'Farmer's Budget' programme facilitated their capacity to approach to the public service providers. According to the FGD findings, the programme in many places of the country arranged face-to-face interactions between the farmers and the service providers. The higher level policy makers were also present in those gatherings. Moreover, many government officials (agricultural officers, extension officials, livestock officials, fishery officials) were brought to the crop fields for interviewing. Such initiative allowed the farmers to interact with them after the completion of the interviews. Such interaction developed capacity for the farmers to approach to the agricultural officials, government and the non-government officials. The programme made them understand their participation in the national budget to raise their voices together. For improved knowledge for exposure to the programme and using information from the same, the farmers are now treated well in the society. According to the FGD findings, many farmers are invited to various social and cultural gatherings like village arbitration, yearly events of the local schools and educational institutes.

Most of the FGD participants in Natore said, "Previously some of the government officers did not value us and even they refused to talk to the farmers. At present, the situation has changed. After holding a HMOM programme in this locality, the government officials are now treating us goodly. Even, they offer us chairs to sit in their offices which was out of our imagination previously". Some of the FGD participants told in Hobiganj and Dinajpur Districts, "The farmer's budget programme has taught us how to raise our voice on agricultural issues and claim due rights to the political leaders and the higher government officials". Some FGD participants in Tangail District said, "He (the programme presenter) brought the government officials in the crop fields to show the farmer's condition and the

agricultural activities which facilitated us to interact face-to-face with them". Thus the programme made bridge between the agricultural service providers, policy makers and the farmers leading to develop mutual understanding.

The content analysis of the 'Agricultural Budget, Farmer's Budget' programme held on 06 May 2017 at Brahmanbaria District shows that the Food Minister, Member of Parliament (MP), Deputy Commissioner (DC), Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Union Parishad Chairman, farmer's leaders, relevant government officials and several thousand farmers attended the programme. They interacted face-to-face with the facilitation of Shykh Seraj which was telecast live on the Channel i. The Food Minister in his speech claimed that the HMOM programme facilitated the policy makers to rethink the budgetary allocation for the development of agriculture sector through presenting the pragmatic issues in this field by capturing voice of the farmers. According to him, the government became informed of the farmer's issues which contributed to developing farmer's friendly budgetary allocation in the national budget. In the programme, the UNO, the Chief Executive of the government at the sub-district level, welcomed the farmers in his office for any sort of cooperation. The content analysis of the 'Farmer's Budget' held on 29 April 2017 in Pirozpur District shows that the Minister for the Ministry of Industry asked the relevant officials to note down the farmer's issues coming from the face-to-face interactions facilitated by Shykh Seraj. Similarly, the content analysis of the programme held on 22 April 2017 in Chandpur District shows, the ICT Minister announced that his ministry would provide five thousand smart cards for which the farmers would be able to sell their rice directly to the government without interference of the intermediaries. According to the Key Informant Interviews (KII), such public declarations by the key government officials and the policy makers made the farmers more confident and enabled them to claim their due rights in the relevant government service providers. Such public statements have also created obligations for the government officials to serve the people.

The programme brought the senior officials, highest policy making bodies, farmer's leaders, civil society members and the common masses into a single platform of interaction which facilitated the farmers to raise their voices before the policy makers. In this way, the programme contributed to empowering the farmers by 'pushing' the policy makers from their top position to reach the farmers, the bottommost population in Bangladesh, and by 'pulling' the farmers to come forward from their backward position to the frontline for raising their voices. The programme, though in limited ways comparing to the male, encouraged the female farmers by presenting their contribution to agricultural activities explicitly in the areas of homestead gardening, live assets rearing, poultry raising, rooftop gardening, preserving seeds and growing seedlings according to the findings from the FGD,

KII and content analysis. Such sort of portrayal facilitated women empowerment. The young urban students of various institutions were oriented on diverse agricultural activities and the bone-breaking labour of the farmers through Firey Cholo Matir Taney (Revising to the Roots) programme. This programme linked the students with the farmers by encouraging them to visit the villages and take part in agricultural activities together with the farmers. In this way, the young urban students living in the capital city were oriented with different stages and techniques of agricultural activities the farmers generally carry out.

The farmers are now being invited to the village arbitrations where their opinions are considered important. After disseminating the success stories of the farmers in varied agricultural activities, their visibility has increased. They are, at present, honoured by the fellow farmers and the opinion leaders of the communities. Some of the FGD participants in Dinajpur District stated, "We are honoured in the villages since people think we are not alone. A TV channel stands by our side which depicts our issues to the nation".

Outcomes of Benefits

According to most of the FGD participants and the Key Informant Interviewees, the aforesaid benefits had visible outcomes to the farmers. With the increased knowledge and information, the farmers became able to produce diversified crops at the minimal costing. Their improved linkage with vendors and market actors facilitated them to get more prices of their products. Earning more money by selling their products brought honour for them. With the improved financial capability, the farmers could contribute more effectively to their children's food, nutrition, health and education. Many farmers were able to transform their lives from 'survival' to 'surplus' economic condition adopting multiple IGAs (income generating activities). Thus, the benefits contributed to uplift the overall socio-economic status of the farmers. Development of the socio-economic indicators like national growth rate, literacy, reduction of poverty, rate of sanitation etc. in the recent years can be linked with the development of the agriculture and its associated sectors in Bangladesh. Thus, the agricultural growth has contributed largely to the economic development of Bangladesh.

Relation with Theoretical Underpinning

Sen (1997) emphasise on human capabilities for development. According to him, capability is developed through literacy, information and awareness. Human capital and social capital are two important factors for human development. Human capitals mean developing skills, knowledge level and ability to choose the right

decisions from the alternatives. On the other hand, the social capitals mean the linkage/networking, identity and the social organizations of the individual which contribute to the collective development. The study shows that the farmer's information and knowledge on agriculture have developed which promoted their capacity to produce more crops and thus increased their purchasing capacity. The programme created a platform of interaction for the farmers with the government officials and other service providers which developed their capacity to approach to the authorities and claim their rights. Such activities contributed to increasing capacity of the farmers to develop professional linkage with the service providers and also among the fellow farmers. They have jointly planned and implemented agricultural schemes, for example, cooperative irrigation and fishing project. Thus, farmer's networks were formed in a manner of 'social capital' which supported their collective gains and effective social actions rather than individual benefits. The FGD and KII findings reveal that the programme contributed to uplifting the status of the farmers in the community by increasing their productions and income. Many farmers are now aware of their children's education, individual and familial health, rights-related issues, improved dwelling, savings, healthy living, food and nutrition since their purchasing capability has increased as per the opinion of the FGD participants and KII respondents.

Based upon above mentioned findings and subsequent analysis, it is revealed that the programme contributed visibly to 'power from within', 'power to' and 'power with' - the three tiers except the last one 'power over'. The KII findings show the farmers in Bangladesh are still struggling to form a non-political national platform to influence the agricultural policies in the expected level. This can be understood in terms of the recent farmer's protest (2020-2021) in India where the farmers were seen more organized and vocal against three farm acts perceived as 'anti-farmer laws'. Such movement included all India farmers who spontaneously participated in their protest for which the government got back from its decision. This type of farmer's organization in Bangladesh is virtually absent that limits their 'power over'.

Conclusion

In the holistic consideration, the flow of agricultural information throughout the country is still inadequate comparing to the needs of the farmers. Importance of the agricultural information has been focused in the National Agricultural Policy 2013 in which one of the suggestions was to increase collaborative approach among the government and non-government media outlets for disseminating agricultural information. However, there were no mentionable initiatives undertaken

en so far to implement the suggestion. This has narrowed down the opportunity of utilizing the ever-growing private TV channels in dissemination of agricultural information. The long-standing demand for setting up of an agro-based TV channel in the country has yet to be implemented. There are also gaps in formal communication, experience sharing and exchange programmes between the agricultural reporters and the sector experts from the government and non-government organizations and the departments. Therefore, the government should undertake an integrated approach of disseminating of agricultural information together with the private television channels. In this perspective, HMOM can be considered as an effective programme which can be referred as a model. However, the programme should undertake necessary campaign to form a non-political nationwide network of the farmers to escalate their voices in the national level policies.

Note: This article has been written based on the author's doctoral thesis titled '*Perception of Farmers on the Impact of Television Programme in Sustainable Agricultural Development of Bangladesh: A Case Study on Hridoye Mati O Manush (Soil and People in Heart)*' awarded in 2018 which was supervised by Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism. University of Dhaka.

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