

## Scaling up note



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Bangladesh - Microfinance for Marginal and  
Small Farmers Project

## Country and rural sector background

Building on its remarkable social and economic performance over the past 20 years, Bangladesh has recently been classified as a lower-middle-income country and aims to reach upper-middle-income country status by 2021. To achieve this, the Government of Bangladesh will need to overcome considerable challenges in agricultural development and rural economic growth. The country's annual GDP growth averaged about 6 per cent between 2000 and 2013, and was accompanied by a decline in the national poverty rate from 48.9 per cent to 31.5 per cent over the first decade of the century, effectively lifting some 16 million people out of poverty.

Bangladesh, a country of over 160 million inhabitants, has also made noteworthy gains in education and health, and made good progress towards achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite these gains, Bangladesh remains a poor country, with a 2014 GDP per capita of US\$1,080. The country is regularly hit by natural disasters that severely impact the economy, disproportionately affecting infrastructure and the agriculture sector, as well as vulnerable groups. Nutrition outcomes have not kept pace with the progress achieved with most social and economic indicators.

Agriculture occupies some three quarters of the country's limited land area and supports the livelihoods of most of the population. While overall poverty has significantly declined in recent years, in rural areas the poverty rate (still around 35 per cent) has not declined as fast as it has in urban settings. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty in rural areas is still three times higher than in urban areas.

The contribution of agriculture to the country's economic output has declined over the past decade, but crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries still collectively account for 17 per cent of GDP. With some 67 per cent of the population living in rural areas and over 43 per cent of the country's total labour force engaged in agriculture, achieving further economic growth and poverty reduction that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable will require policies and investments conducive to lasting transformational changes in rural areas – including through technological innovation in agriculture.

Population growth has dropped sharply in recent years, but population density remains extremely high (above 1,000 people/km<sup>2</sup>), placing enormous pressure on the country's natural resources – especially arable land. Lack of employment leads many Bangladeshis to seek work abroad (the diaspora is estimated at 20 million and remittances in 2014 were in excess of US\$14 billion).

Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Two thirds of its territory is less than 5 metres above sea level, making it one of the most flood-prone countries in the world. Climate change seems likely to increase the destruction caused by monsoon floods and the frequency of cyclones. Poor people are hit hardest because they are more densely concentrated in badly constructed housing on hazard-prone land.

Poor rural people face a number of constraints, primarily related to a lack of the following: (i) infrastructure and access to market; (ii) access to financial services/credit; (iii) adapted advisory services; and (iv) access to climate change resilience solutions.

## Key elements of IFAD's country programme

Cooperation between IFAD and the government has involved loans, grants and non-lending activities, such as knowledge management, policy dialogue and partnership-building.

Since 1979, IFAD has financed 30 projects in Bangladesh for a total project cost of US\$1,690 million, including US\$674 million from IFAD resources, which positions Bangladesh among the top three recipients of IFAD funding, both in the region of Asia and the Pacific, and globally. The country has also benefited from several IFAD country grants supporting, for example, research and development, and knowledge management initiatives, for a total of US\$3.9 million. Bangladesh has also been covered by several global and regional IFAD grants supporting capacity-building and knowledge-sharing.

Cofinancing by other development partners accounted for US\$614 million (with an average IFAD-partner ratio of approximately 1:1), and by government and beneficiaries for US\$366 million (with an average IFAD-country ratio of approximately 1:0.5). The major external cofinanciers in Bangladesh are the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), Germany's KfW Development Bank (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*), Netherlands, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Spain, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. In addition to the government and the beneficiaries, the major national cofinancier of IFAD-funded interventions is the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), the apex organization for microcredit in Bangladesh (with an IFAD-PKSF ratio of 1:1.25 for the last Promoting Agricultural Commercialization and Enterprises, or PACE, project).

At present, there are six ongoing IFAD-supported operations in Bangladesh: (i) National Agricultural Technology Program Phase 2 (NATP-2); (ii) Participatory Small-scale Water Resources Sector Project (PSSWRSP); (iii) Char Development and Settlement Project IV (CDSP IV); (iv) Haor Infrastructure and Livelihood Improvement Project – Climate Adaptation and Livelihood Protection (HILIP/CALIP); (v) Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project (CCRIP); and (vi) Promoting Agricultural Commercialization and Enterprises (PACE).

The government's coordinating ministries for IFAD in Bangladesh are the Ministry of Finance, and in particular its Economic Relations Division; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock; the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and in particular the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED); and PKSF. Main partners also include the Bangladesh Water Development Board of the Ministry of Water Resources.

Linking in to the government's top priorities, over the last ten years the greater part of IFAD's portfolio in Bangladesh has been concentrated on: (i) rural infrastructure (51 per cent), which includes village roads, market and transport infrastructure, and water management infrastructure; (ii) rural financial services

(13 per cent), including agricultural and seasonal loans and technical support; and (iii) agriculture, aquaculture and livestock development activities (17 per cent).

The Government of Bangladesh and IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation have rated the relevance of the IFAD country programme as satisfactory and well in line with (i) government/beneficiary demand; (ii) Bangladesh's Vision 2021 and its goal to become an upper-middle-income country; and (iii) the different ongoing national policies and regulations.

As agreed and negotiated through the 2012-2018 COSOP objectives, IFAD will pursue its commitment to support the government with its lending and non-lending instruments in three key areas: (i) resilience to climate change; (ii) market access and value chain development; and (iii) economically and socially sustainable empowerment of marginalized groups.

The IFAD PBAS allocation for Bangladesh was US\$45 million for the 2004-2006 cycle, while for the 2013-2015 cycle, it had increased to US\$108 million.

## The scaling-up experience in Bangladesh

### Overview

In Bangladesh IFAD has a history of replicating and scaling up successful innovations, many of which have now been mainstreamed into the activities of government agencies. Examples of such innovations include: (i) community infrastructure development through labour contracting societies (LCSs – see box 1); (ii) tailored financial services for small and marginal rural enterprises; and (iii) community-based natural resource management through Beel User Groups (BUGs).

**Infrastructure development through LCSs.** In response to country priorities, IFAD is investing in rural roads and market infrastructures to enhance livelihoods and create resilience to adverse weather. IFAD works in partnership with LGED to boost rural economy through the construction of roads, markets and water management infrastructure. Poor women and men of the community, organized into LCSs, are employed to provide the unskilled and low-skilled labour needed to ensure completion of these civil works. This practice has now been mainstreamed into LGED at the national level.

Jointly analysed by IFAD, the Ministry of Finance, LGED, the project team and the community, the LCS pilot, initially promoted by the Market Infrastructure Development Project in Charland Regions (MIDPCR), has been largely replicated in other projects co-funded by IFAD: for example, the Sunamganj Community-based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP), CCRIP (US\$150 million), HILIP/CALIP (US\$133 million), in addition to projects funded entirely by other donors, such as the Haor Flood Management and Livelihood Improvement Project funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). LGED, which manages an annual investment budget of approximately US\$1.5 billion (one third sourced by donors and two thirds by the government) has today also widely replicated the LCS approach in its own funded civil works investments.

#### **Box 1. Labour contracting societies: generating employment and income for communities in Bangladesh**

A labour contracting society (LCS) is a group of adults (both women and men) of similar socio-economic status and skills level, usually landless labourers or members of sharecropper households, who are dependent on manual labour as their main source of income. The number of members in an LCS depends on the volume and type of works to be completed, the experience of the labourers, local supervision capacity (of the *upazila* [subdistrict] engineer's office) and the time frame for the works to be done. The members of the LCS are trained in basic, often labour-intensive, techniques.

Under IFAD-supported projects, construction contracts are awarded to LCSs rather than traditional contractors, so that members can earn a daily wage as construction workers. Once the works have been completed, LCS members receive and share a percentage of the profits related to the construction contract. The LCS approach has two primary advantages: (i) the whole community, in addition to the

members of the LCS, benefits from the improved infrastructure and a greater sense of ownership; and (ii) employment is created for the LCS members, who would otherwise be unemployed or have a very low income. LCS members may also receive additional training in income-generating activities (keeping vegetable plots, rearing ducklings, paravet training, etc.) so they can invest their profits in their own rural enterprises or adopt agricultural technologies provided by the projects. This increases self-reliance and ultimately can lead to sustainable self-employment.

**Financial services for small/marginal farmers.** In order to address the issue of access to agricultural credit, IFAD and PKSf, in consultation with communities and the government, identified the existing problems and piloted new lending products for small-scale agriculture through PKSf's partner organizations (POs). At the time, this was an innovative move because although microcredit was highly developed by many institutions in Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and PKSf, there were very few cases of small farmers being provided with credit for agricultural purposes.

Through the Microfinance for Marginal and Small Farmers Project (MFMSFP), IFAD provided funds and technical assistance to test two new financial products: (i) seasonal loans, and (ii) agricultural microcredit. Thanks to IFAD's global experience in rural finance and to the Ministry of Finance and PKSf's national expertise, monitoring and analysis was started in a pilot organized with 35 POs. Under MFMSFP, 200,000 marginal and small farmers in Bangladesh benefited from access to vital agricultural financial services. Given the success of the pilot, these two agricultural financial products were mainstreamed into PKSf's core programme and are now provided by 236 POs across the country.

These two innovative financial instruments have proved to be sustainable, with a 98 per cent loan recovery rate that allows PKSf and its POs to leverage much larger sums than the initial investments. The introduction of these instruments translated into a 50 per cent increase in sales of rice and vegetables by beneficiaries and increases of 21-45 per cent in net income, as assessed by an external evaluation. The two financial products were not only rapidly adopted by all POs but were also established as regular products of PKSf-supported institutions, backed by an Agriculture Unit and a Livestock Unit set up within PKSf itself. Today, these two products represent 40 per cent of PKSf's overall lending activities, which for 2014-2015 amounted to around US\$200 million.

Given the success of the pilot and the continuing demand from small and marginalized farmers, PKSf was able to convince other financial partners (both multilateral and bilateral) to come on board, thus leveraging sufficient additional finance to ensure this scaling-up exercise had a strong impact.

The United States Department of the Treasury selected this IFAD-supported project – Microfinance for Marginal and Small Farmers Project – as the winner of its Development Impact Honors Award 2014.

**Community resource management.** In the Haor area of north-east Bangladesh, rural areas are under floodwater for six months of the year as a result of the monsoon season in the Himalayas and the natural water draining system. During the dry season, fish that have gathered during the flood period become concentrated in the remaining body of water in the beels, thus representing an important local financial resource. Traditionally, wealthy local individuals would buy exclusive fishing rights for the entire dry season through a bidding system, which excluded the local community from accessing their natural local resources, even to feed themselves.

Faced with this situation, a pilot was set up under the Sunamganj Community-based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) with IFAD financial and technical support. The objective was to organize communities so that they would be able to manage their own beels themselves. Beel User Groups (BUGs) – groups of fishers, both women and men, living in communities around large inland water bodies – were organized, trained and supported in order to: (i) manage their fish resources in a sustainable way; and (ii) ensure they had official and legal recognition of their right to exploit the beels under long-term leases issued by the Ministry of Land. Tested successfully in a few beels, this approach has been replicated and scaled up by other IFAD-supported projects and is now applied to more than 400 beels, corresponding to more than 10,000 households.

With support from WorldFish in the monitoring and analysis of fish production, SCBRMP has shown how transferring these natural resources to local communities can greatly improve the quality and productivity of culture fisheries (small-scale aquaculture ponds) and inland capture fisheries (open water fisheries in beels

and haors). It has also shown how this can lead to the generation of significant income for these community-based associations.

To complement the work done, an IFAD grant provided to WorldFish focused on improving the understanding of links between fisheries and nutrition. Through the introduction of small, nutrient-dense fish species (particularly mola), highly efficient, diverse polyculture systems – also including high-value fish – were developed. The initiative demonstrated the potential not only for improving livelihoods – small-fish productivity in the project's ponds increased from less than 1 ton/hectare to more than 3 tons/hectare – but also for significantly improving the nutrition of poor families, who were now able to afford the small fish. This can be considered an example of functional scaling up, which has also significantly broadened the knowledge base for improving the lives of poor rural people through better nutrition. The linkage with other projects in Sunamganj and north-west Bangladesh provided a receptive environment for the introduction of the small fish.

Today, these different approaches (developing sustainable BUGs, issuing long-term leases to BUGs, developing polyculture systems) have been capitalized, disseminated at the national level and replicated through LGED or IFAD-supported projects such as HILIP/CALIP. In collaboration with LGED and the local government division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, IFAD is now supporting efforts to mainstream the BUG and small-fish approaches into the policies of the Ministry of Land and the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock.

Although this has been a difficult process – providing support to open water inland fisheries for more than 24 years – increasing the confidence and power of grass-roots community organizations has made a clear contribution to securing their sustainable development. One of the key objectives of HILIP/CALIP is now to support the finalization of changes expected in the text regulating the beels. In parallel, IFAD will continue to support LGED (with partners) to ensure more systematic development of BUGs, which, together, will have more weight at the national level in decisions taken on the attribution of beels.

### General pathway of the scaling-up experience

In each of the scaling-up examples described above, a similar pathway has been followed. The three main phases are outlined below:

- **Innovation:** the problem, the demand and the solutions were jointly analysed, tested, monitored, fine-tuned and reoriented (where necessary), up to the final and satisfactory product/approach.
- **Monitoring, assessment and learning:** joint IFAD/Government of Bangladesh knowledge management products were developed and shared with beneficiaries and with national and international partners.
- **Scaling up:** this phase included (i) financial leverage, partly from IFAD, but mainly from the government and other donors, through strategic partnership; (ii) advocacy and joint policy influencing, together with efforts to institutionalize the successful approaches and thus secure their sustainability; and (iii) communication to guarantee full knowledge of the products developed and sufficient interest in them.

## Future strategy for scaling up

Up to the end of the 2012-2018 COSOP, IFAD will continue developing a two-pronged strategy for scaling up in Bangladesh. One line of intervention will consist of: (i) consolidating and capitalizing current scaling-up activities in the promotion of rural employment (through LCSs) and the provision of agricultural and seasonal loans to small and marginalized farmers; and (ii) institutionalizing the empowerment of communities (BUGs). Pathways and drivers for scaling up will be defined in consultation with current partners so that adapted and tailored IFAD financial, policy and knowledge services can be provided to ensure larger impact. More systematic linkages will be sought, for example, between LCSs, private actors in value chains, and financial institutions. A second line of intervention will be based on current pilots and models tested through ongoing projects, in particular on: (i) climate change adaptation through weather forecast and early warning systems; and (ii) public-private-producer partnerships for value chain development. Lessons will be drawn from these pilots and a scaling-up strategy will be formulated.

IFAD, together with its partners, is embarking on a review of current pro-poor policies in Bangladesh. Based on lessons learned and the potential for improvement, a scaling-up strategy will be discussed and defined, with key steps and resources being mapped out before implementation during the next three years. Input from both the IFAD country office (country programme manager/country programme officer) and implementing agencies/partners is crucial in pushing the policy agenda from different angles. PKSF, LGED and the Bangladesh Water Development Board have direct access to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and the Ministry of Water Resources; through various activities they also have daily interaction with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and the Ministry of Land, where they continuously convey policy messages promoted by IFAD interventions.

Our work with other partners, such as ADB, the World Bank and sister United Nations organizations, is also important in strengthening the influence of IFAD policy messages.

### **Knowledge generation and sharing**

Learning and knowledge management are essential for documenting and sharing successful innovations with broader audiences (other projects, partners, countries). Knowledge management of the Bangladesh portfolio is guided by IFAD's Knowledge Management Strategy to ensure the development effectiveness of the country programme. Bangladesh is proactive in disseminating knowledge and experience, with the support of IFAD's knowledge management specialists and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialists at the country level, and with gender advisers who act as focal points at the project level. Knowledge generation and sharing in Bangladesh can contribute to leveraging resources and partners so that we can deliver more results for more poor rural people in a sustainable way.

In order to strengthen knowledge-sharing and learning processes, IFAD's Asia and the Pacific Division, in collaboration with its Controller's and Financial Services Division, convened a capacity enhancement workshop for Bangladesh operations in April 2015. This event provided the opportunity for key project staff to develop capacity in the areas of the annual workplan and budget, financial management, procurement, M&E and knowledge management. In addition, participants discussed existing or potential implementation issues related to other projects and made collective decisions about how they could improve project implementation and performance in the future. A five-day Learning Route on Scaling Up Bangladesh Rural Development Best Practices: Lessons Learned by the Finance for Enterprise Development and Employment Creation Project (FEDEC) in the Development of Value Chains was organized during September 2014 in Satkhira and Jessore by IFAD's partner PROCASUR.

At the project level, knowledge management activities, such as exchange visits across projects and across districts in the same project, field observation, and media broadcasting, are regularly planned and organized. Many case studies, bulletins and gender reports have been published and shared widely on IFADAsia, LGED websites, press releases, as well as with line departments. For instance, HILIP/CALIP gender briefs on motherhood and women's labour force, employment generation, and women's entrepreneurship development have been shared with LGED's Gender and Development Forum and published in the LGED annual report.

When innovation and technology are shown to be successful in a project, other projects are also keen to test new adaptations in their own activities and then scale up good practices. Although sharing critical lessons learned from failures can constitute valuable feedback to avoid similar mistakes being made in the future, promoting good practices is more common and widely encouraged.

IFAD has also taken steps to improve knowledge management and the sharing of project results and lessons. The IFAD Bangladesh country programme team has now produced the country profile brochure, newsletters, mission case studies, as well as this scaling up note, to provide information about ongoing operations and good practices for its development partners, donors and other key individuals in government, NGOs and civil society.

### **Key drivers and spaces for scaling up**

Bangladesh has proven to be a fertile ground for the successful scaling up of approaches and experiences, which have resulted in the adoption of specific policies and practices by the Government of Bangladesh, government line departments and agencies, and other partners. These successes have been made

possible by a series of factors relating to: (i) the political space; (ii) the financial space; (iii) partnerships; and (iv) the institutional space.

**Political space.** First and foremost, the political space has been crucial in enabling the scaling-up agenda. The government has very clear development and economic strategies, which are guided by its Vision 2021. Other strategic documents, such as the current Sixth Five-Year Plan and the upcoming Seventh Five-Year Plan, also provide clear results-based targets. The development agenda is a top priority for the government, which facilitates the process of scaling up innovations, as the country strives to research, develop and deliver new and more effective approaches and to continue building on the momentum in order to reach its target of becoming a higher-middle-income country within the next few years. The BUG approach, for example, which was first used by SCBRMP, would have encountered insurmountable obstacles without the support from LGED and the Ministry of Land.

Political guidance such as this is invaluable when projects are being designed because – by defining the government’s priorities – it provides a framework for identifying which practices are most likely to be scaled up successfully. But in Bangladesh the political engagement does not limit itself to identifying scaling-up priorities, fostering innovations through results-based management or developing laws and policies to include lessons learned from development experiences; it also spills over into the financial space because the government is an important and active investor in projects.

**Financial space.** In Bangladesh, financial space has been a major facilitating factor in scaling up innovations. IFAD investments alone (described above in “Key elements of IFAD’s country programme”) are not sufficient to ensure the scaling up of successful approaches. In fact, the adoption and expansion of seasonal loans would not have been possible without the important financial investments made by PKSF and its network of POs. Similarly, the government is an important investor in IFAD-supported projects, as its US\$366 million counterpart contribution shows. Another important aspect of the financial space relates to leveraging funds from cofinanciers in order to promote the adoption of innovations across the spectrum of donor-aided projects. In this context, the contribution of cofinanciers such as ADB, DANIDA, KfW, Netherlands, NORAD, Spain, USAID and the World Bank has been crucial, and also highlights the importance of solid partnerships in successfully scaling up.

**Partnerships.** Another fundamental part of the scaling-up process is solid partnerships. Partnerships with other donors and development agencies have helped IFAD leverage investments through cofinanciers, and have allowed the scaling up of successful approaches such as the LCS in CCRIP, which is cofinanced with ADB and KfW, and agricultural technologies under NATP, cofinanced with the World Bank.

Partnerships, however, do not relate only to the financial space. Solid partnerships with other development actors – NGOs, other United Nations agencies (e.g. United Nations Development Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Food Programme), government line departments (e.g. Department of Agricultural Extension, Agriculture Information Service) and research centres (e.g. WorldFish) – have greatly facilitated the flow of knowledge and information. They have also contributed to identifying which approaches and technologies have been successful. For example, the monitoring and research work undertaken by WorldFish for SCBRMP and HILIP on the impact of the BUG approach on fish productivity and biodiversity is proving to be essential in securing the adoption of this approach by the Ministry of Land. One of the most important types of partnership for ensuring the success of the scaling-up model is that with strong implementing agencies, which can also be linked to the institutional space.

**Institutional space.** Possibly the most crucial factor in the entire scaling-up process is institutional space. Strong implementation agencies such as PKSF and LGED have been the foundation of the successes described throughout this note. The commitment and the capacity of their staff implementing the projects on the ground remain critical in ensuring that activities are properly rolled out and ultimately achieve the expected outputs. In addition, these agencies must be able to correctly study, monitor and evaluate their activities in order to ensure successful implementation. They must also be able to provide accurate and reliable data and knowledge that will then be used to support the scaling up of activities. Ultimately, strong institutions are necessary to bring all the other factors together: political will, important funding and strong partnerships will only contribute to the scaling-up process if the implementing agencies have the capacity to deliver the outputs designed by projects.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The efficiency of the M&E system is considered satisfactory. According to the recent Bangladesh country programme evaluation, the average performance (evaluated as a project status report score) of M&E of Bangladesh projects supervised by IFAD is better than the regional average. IFAD provides direct supervision and implementation support to projects, whereas projects monitor impacts through IFAD's Result and Impact Management System (RIMS), including a baseline survey, a mid-term survey and a final follow-up survey.

In Bangladesh, most of the projects have decentralized M&E by putting in place a bottom-up reporting system from union to *upazila*, district and then project management unit (PMU) level. Quality control and regular field visits are conducted by M&E staff from the PMU in order to provide a basis for analysing progress towards intended results, identifying problems and reporting to IFAD.

Comprehensive M&E arrangements were put in place in the Market Infrastructure Development Project in Charland Regions (MIDPCR) project, where an independent M&E unit was established within the PMU, headed by an M&E specialist, with a field monitoring officer and two computer operators based in project districts. The project carried out a series of baseline and impact studies in 2009-2010, including: a number of case studies; an impact assessment of the improved market connecting roads and ghats; impact studies on fish, vegetable and poultry subsectors; and two knowledge, attitude, practice (KAP) surveys to assess the effectiveness of training in homestead vegetable cultivation and beef fattening.

Systematic M&E during implementation, together with good knowledge management, can demonstrate and disseminate successful innovation, good practices and lessons learned from what could have been done better. Therefore, IFAD will continue to provide implementation support to build effective M&E systems.

## Key lessons for scaling up in the country

The key lessons in Bangladesh are listed below:

- Innovations should be client demand-driven. It is important to ensure that IFAD interventions are backed by surveys and budgeting that are sufficient to allow better knowledge of the context.
- Ownership of the innovation, by both the community and the lead institutions, is a key factor in ensuring replicability. Discussions/exchanges must take place from the very early stages.
- Institutional and policy changes need to be led by national partners that have sufficient representation, power and credibility at the national level. A clear strategy needs to be developed to achieve this.
- Scaling up activities to a significant level requires replication by the government and/or other donors as well. Any innovations proposed must, therefore, have been well documented and backed by a reliable evidence base. M&E is central to this process.



International Fund for Agricultural Development

Via Paolo di Dono, 44 - 00142 Rome, Italy

Tel: +39 06 54591 - Fax: +39 06 5043463

E-mail: [ifad@ifad.org](mailto:ifad@ifad.org)

[www.ifad.org](http://www.ifad.org)

[www.ruralpovertyportal.org](http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org)

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### Originator

**Hubert Boirard**

Country Programme Manager

Asia and the Pacific Region

[h.boirard@ifad.org](mailto:h.boirard@ifad.org)

### Contact

**Maria-Elena Mangiafico**

Knowledge Management and Grants Officer

Policy and Technical Advisory Division

E-mail: [m.mangiafico@ifad.org](mailto:m.mangiafico@ifad.org)

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