

CIRDAP at 47: Connecting Nations and Shaping Rural Futures



A SPECIAL EDITION

**Commemorating the 2nd World Rural Development Day
(6 July), 2026**

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**Empowered
Communities**



**Sustainable
Livelihoods**



**Resilient
Futures**



**Inclusive
Development**



**Centre on Integrated Rural Development
for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)**

CIRDAP at 47: Connecting Nations and Shaping Rural Futures



A SPECIAL EDITION

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Centre on Integrated for Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific



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Forward

As CIRDAP enters its 47th year of dedicated service to rural communities across Asia and the Pacific, the organization continues to stand as a beacon of excellence in integrated rural development. Over the decades, the organization has built a strong legacy of pioneering initiatives, regional cooperation, knowledge sharing, innovative approaches, and scalable solutions that respond to the evolving challenges and aspirations of rural communities across its Member Countries.

In 2024, CIRDAP achieved a landmark milestone with global significance. *The United Nations officially recognized 6 July as World Rural Development Day (WRDD)*, a historic achievement that underscores the growing importance of rural development in the global development agenda. The date bears special meaning for CIRDAP, as it marks the organization's Foundation Day. On 6 July 1979, CIRDAP was established with a vision to foster regional cooperation and promote integrated rural development across Asia and the Pacific. The international observance of World Rural Development Day on this date serves as a fitting tribute to CIRDAP's enduring legacy and its decades-long commitment to improving the lives and livelihoods of rural communities throughout the region.

The recognition of 6 July as World Rural Development Day is therefore more than a commemorative occasion. It is a call to action, solidarity and shared responsibility. For CIRDAP, the Day provides an opportunity to move beyond celebration and inspire governments, development partners, institutions, civil society, communities and individuals to translate their commitment to rural development into concrete, inclusive and sustainable action.

The growing engagement of CIRDAP Member Countries in observing WRDD reflects an emerging regional movement—one that recognizes that vibrant rural communities are fundamental to achieving inclusive growth, food security, climate resilience, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Each year, the observance creates a platform to highlight rural voices, showcase innovative solutions, exchange knowledge, and renew commitments to ensuring that **no rural community is left behind**.

Looking ahead, CIRDAP aspires to broaden this movement beyond its existing regional network, strengthening partnerships and welcoming greater participation from countries across Asia and the Pacific and beyond. The vision is clear: **World Rural Development Day should belong not to one organization or one region, but to everyone who believes in the power and potential of rural communities.**

Dr. P Chandra Shekara
DG, CIRDAP

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CHAPTER 1

About Centre on Integrated for Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP): An Introduction

1.1 Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

As a pioneer Intergovernmental, Autonomous and Regional organization, Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) established on July 6 back in 46 years ago with a vision *'to be a Centre of Excellence and multi-level platform for cooperation in knowledge transfer and capacity building for developing countries in integrated rural affairs for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific Region'*. 15 Asia and Pacific countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, IR Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam are members of CIRDAP.

On July 6, 1979, the Asia-Pacific countries along with other countries came in hands together to create an organization which would promote Integrated Rural Development (IRD) in the Asia-Pacific region through regional cooperation amongst Member States, Link Institutes and Development Partners. This organization was established through an international agreement lodged with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Since its inception, CIRDAP seeks to improve the quality of life of the far-reaching marginalized rural people, the ultimate beneficiaries of CIRDAP are farmers and rural communities. Headquartered at Chameli House, Bangladesh, the organization fosters knowledge exchange, policy support, and capacity building to empower rural communities and drive sustainable development across Asia-Pacific.

The idea of an organization which will deal with the rural poverty and development challenges came into mind during early 1970's within the discussions of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. A proposal amongst the government was crafted and consulted for a Centre on Integrated Rural Development (IRD) in Bangkok, Thailand, in March 1976. The Director General (DG) of FAO called a Conference of Plenipotentiaries to adopt the agreement to establish the Centre. On July 29, 1978, this conference was held in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia and after two days on August 1, 1978, the agreement was adopted and signed. At the conference, it was decided Bangladesh will be the host country of the Centre.

CIRDAP started its journey initially with the six countries under the auspicious leadership of its founder leadership Azizul Haq in an office at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Cumilla, Bangladesh. During the tenure of Mr. Azizul Haq, the member countries grew into 11 states. Currently, CIRDAP has 15 member countries. In 1985, CIRDAP relocated its office to the historic building called 'Chameli House' in Dhaka. The building was handed over to the Centre by Bangladesh government. Over the years, CIRDAP had received continued support from key international development partners notably the Government of Japan and FAO.

Since its inception, CIRDAP has conducted a wide range of activities including training programmes – Thousands of Rural Development professionals from member countries have been trained in areas such as project management, gender mainstreaming, microfinance, sustainable agriculture, ICT etc.; Action Research – supported pilot projects across its member countries to test and document effective models of community driven development; and Knowledge Sharing & Management – through its publication, journals and digital platforms.

How does CIRDAP work?

- CIRDAP provides technical and policy support to ministries and institutions involved in Integrated Rural Development (IRD) by enabling and helping national decision-makers, development practitioners, and planners to exchange ideas and experiences on IRD and to identify areas in which collaborative efforts can be promoted for the mutual benefit of member states.
- CIRDAP works to identify opportunities for collaborative efforts among member states to enhance integrated rural development and address common challenges, particularly in poverty alleviation.

Mission of CIRDAP

To provide technical support and promote innovative best practices on sustainable IRD amongst member countries in Asia-Pacific in order to improve the lives of the rural people.

- To Utilize state-of-the-art ICT
- Provide flagship training and capacity development
- Enhance analytical capability in formulating policies & determining appropriate measures (impacts of globalization, trade liberalization, climate change and disaster risks, engagement of communities)
- Foster cooperation on development through collaborative research projects
- Disseminate knowledge gained and transfer of innovative technologies

CIRDAP's Core Activities:

1. **Research:** Conducting studies and research on rural development issues to inform policy and program design.
2. **Pilot Projects:** Implementing and evaluating pilot projects that demonstrate innovative rural development solutions.
3. **Training and Education:** Providing capacity-building opportunities through training programs and educational initiatives to strengthen skills in rural development.
4. **Exposure Visits:** Organizing visits to successful rural development programs to allow decision-makers and practitioners to learn from each other's experiences.
5. **Consultative Conferences/Policy Dialogues:** Hosting conferences and dialogues to foster discussions among stakeholders, share best practices, and identifying common strategies.
6. **Dissemination of Information:** Sharing knowledge, research, and best practices across member states to support informed decision-making.

Organizational Structure

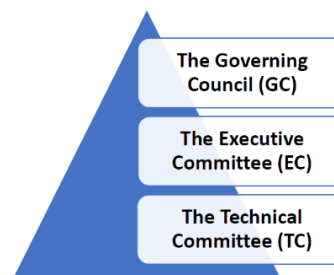
The Centre is administered by the Secretariat based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. CIRDAP has three governing bodies, namely Governing Council (GC), the Executive Committee (EC) and the Technical Committee (TC). *The Governing Council (GC)* is the highest policy and decision-making body of CIRDAP represented by the Ministers of the designated Contact Ministries of all member countries. It sets the overall policy and programme direction for the Centre. The primary role of *the Executive Committee (EC)* is to review and make recommendations to GC on matters concerning the management and operation of the Centre's activities. It is also responsible for providing guidance to the Centre on implementation of the policies and decisions. *The Technical Committee (TC)* is to provide technical

advice on professional matters concerning work plans and strategies for implementation of the CIRDAP activities, and the interrelationships and coordination of activities carried out by the Centre under auspices of the member countries.

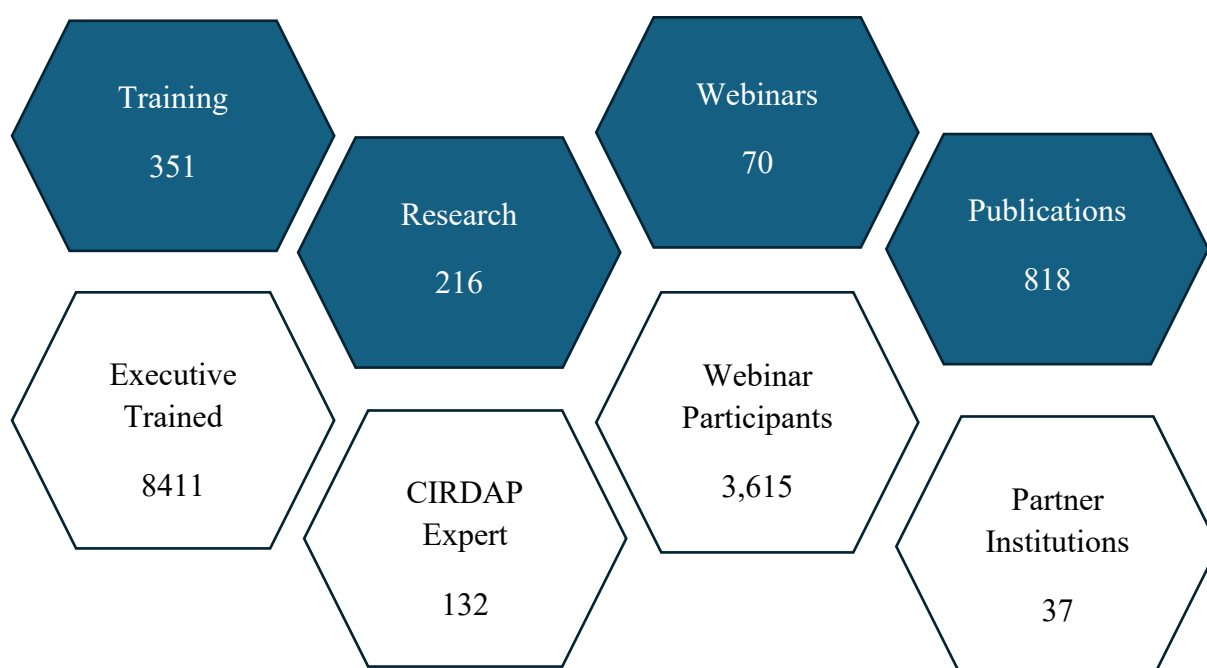
Secretariat

A full-time Director General, selected by the Governing Council for a four-year term is the chief executive of the organization. The work of the Centre is directed by the Director General in accordance with the policy and decisions adopted by the Governing Council under the guidance of the Executive Committee. Under the leadership of Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, Director General of CIRDAP, who is an esteemed professional with over 35 years of experience in Agricultural Extension, Agri-Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Rural Development, and Public-Private Partnerships, the Secretariat plays a crucial role in managing programs, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting innovative approaches to sustainable rural development.

POLICY BODIES OF CIRDAP



CIRDAP IMPACTs since its inception



CHAPTER -2:

CIRDAP's Role: From Originator to Regional Champion

For CIRDAP, World Rural Development Day represents both recognition and responsibility. The UN resolution explicitly acknowledges CIRDAP's role in assisting national action and promoting regional cooperation in integrated rural development. Following the UN proclamation, CIRDAP began encouraging its Member States and partners to collaborate in observing 6 July every year.

In November 2024, CIRDAP's Director General Dr. P Chandra Shekara called for cooperation from Bangladesh and other CIRDAP Member States to institutionalize the observance. Bangladesh also assured continued support for CIRDAP's activities and confirmed its intention to mark the Day annually. This places CIRDAP in a unique position: it can serve as a *regional bridge between the UN's global rural development agenda and national realities across Asia and the Pacific*.

2.1 CIRDAP's 2026 Observance: From Celebration to Regional Platform

The second World Rural Development Day in 2026 was particularly significant for CIRDAP because it coincided with the organization's 47th Foundation Day. On 6 July 2026, CIRDAP organized a major observance at the CIRDAP International Conference Centre in Dhaka, bringing together government ministers, senior officials, diplomats, development partners, academia, civil society, private-sector representatives and media. The event was held in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh and the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division.

CIRDAP adopted the regional theme: ***“Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities”***

The theme complements the UN's global focus while reflecting CIRDAP's longstanding integrated approach to rural development. The 2026 observance also moved beyond speeches and ceremonial activities. Among the initiatives were:

- a regional signature campaign reaffirming commitment to rural development;
- messages from CIRDAP Member States;
- participation by ambassadors and high commissioners;
- engagement with FAO, BIMSTEC and SAARC;
- promotion of rural innovation;
- recognition of rural development innovations; and
- the announcement of winners of the CIRDAP-REEDS International Rural Development Innovation Challenge 2026.

CIRDAP announced 15 winning innovations and five special mentions from Bangladesh during the 2026 celebration, reinforcing the idea that rural development is also a space for creativity, technology, entrepreneurship and locally generated solutions.

The signature campaign was particularly symbolic: it transformed WRDD from an awareness day into a shared pledge for rural transformation involving governments, regional institutions and development partners.

2.2 How CIRDAP Member Countries Are Getting Involved

CIRDAP's 2025 and 2026 observance demonstrates that Member States are increasingly using World Rural Development Day to present their own national experiences, priorities and innovations.

Bangladesh

As the country that initiated the UN resolution and the host country of CIRDAP, Bangladesh occupies a unique position in the history of WRDD.

The Government of Bangladesh has supported the annual observance and worked with CIRDAP to institutionalize 6 July as a national and regional platform for rural development dialogue. In 2026, the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division organized the national-level observance in Dhaka.

FIJI

Fiji commemorated World Rural Development Day (WRDD) as part of a national programme on rural development led by Prime Minister, alongside the commissioning of the newly constructed Nadarivatu Government Station, refurbished staff quarters, and the launch of the 2026 Government Roadshow.

India

India was one of the six members of the original core group that introduced the draft resolution at the UN. In 2026, India's Ministry of Rural Development contributed a special message emphasizing rural livelihoods, infrastructure, community empowerment and opportunities for rural households under its broader national development vision.

Pakistan

Pakistan was an important supporter of the resolution and subsequently observed WRDD nationally. In 2025, Pakistan highlighted investments in agriculture, health and education as important components of improving rural livelihoods.

Lao PDR

Lao PDR has used WRDD 2026 to highlight its rural transformation agenda, including rural connectivity, irrigation, poverty reduction and community resilience. CIRDAP's 2026 Member State messages highlighted national efforts to strengthen rural communities and reduce urban-rural disparities.

Indonesia

Indonesia has highlighted community-based village development, cooperatives, local production and digitalization. Its 2026 contribution emphasized the Merah Putih Village and Neighbourhood Cooperative initiative as a mechanism for strengthening village economies and connecting small producers with markets.

Malaysia

Malaysia's 2026 contribution emphasized a “Whole of Nation” approach involving government, private sector, academia, civil society and local communities. Its message also highlighted the importance of evidence-based policymaking in rural transformation.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran's contribution emphasized evidence-based rural policy, innovation, social participation, environmental sustainability and the empowerment of rural women and youth. Its national focal institution, APERDRI, also continues research and policy work on areas such as rural tourism, handicrafts, spatial planning and women's empowerment.

Myanmar

Myanmar marked WRDD 2026 through a national message linking rural development with cooperatives, food security, community participation and prosperity. Its message emphasized people-centred village development and the importance of government, private-sector, civil-society and community cooperation. These examples demonstrate an important characteristic of World Rural Development Day: there is no single model of rural development.

The Philippines

To bridge the gap between rural and urban realities, the country reaffirms its commitment to sustainable rural development through three interconnected pillars: land tenure security, support services, and socio-economic development through 2026 message.

Each country can use the Day to highlight its own priorities, while CIRDAP provides a platform for regional learning and exchange.

CHAPTER – 3:

Genesis of the World Rural Development Day (6 July) at United Nations

3.1 World Rural Development Day: From a Regional Vision to a Global Commitment: How 6 July Became a Global Day for Rural Development

Every year on 6 July, the world marks World Rural Development Day (WRDD)—an international observance dedicated to recognizing the central role of vibrant and far-reaching rural communities of the world in sustainable development, poverty eradication, food security, environmental sustainability and inclusive economic growth. Although the Day was formally proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly only in 2024, its roots go much deeper. The story of World Rural Development Day is closely connected to the history of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), a regional intergovernmental organization headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The UN resolution itself specifically recognizes the contribution of regional organizations, including CIRDAP, in assisting national action and promoting regional cooperation relating to integrated rural development. Consequently, 6 July represents both a global commitment to rural transformation and a recognition of the institutional legacy of CIRDAP.

From a Regional Vision to a Global Day

A Humble Tribute to former Director General by DG, Dr. P Chandra Shekara

The choice of **6 July** as World Rural Development Day is deliberate and deeply symbolic. The date marks the establishment of the **Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)** on 6 July 1979, connecting the global observance to more than four decades of regional cooperation and collective efforts to advance integrated rural development across Asia and the Pacific.

The vision for transforming this significant date into a global observance was articulated by **Dr. Cherdasak Virapat**, CIRDAP's ninth and former Director General. During CIRDAP's 43rd anniversary on 6 July 2022, Dr. Virapat convened a landmark webinar titled **“World Rural Development Day: What is it, why does it matter and How to get involved?”** The webinar provided an important platform to reflect on the continuing significance of rural communities to sustainable development and to question why, despite their fundamental contribution to food systems, economies, societies and environmental sustainability, there was no dedicated international day specifically recognizing rural development and rural communities.

Dr. Virapat argued that CIRDAP's more than four decades of work to improve rural lives across the Asia-Pacific region provided compelling evidence of the enduring importance of integrated rural development. In his view, the anniversary of CIRDAP's establishment offered not merely an institutional milestone, but a meaningful opportunity to elevate rural development onto the global agenda. 6 July, he envisioned, should become a day for the world to recognize, celebrate and renew its commitment to rural communities and their contribution to sustainable development.

What began as an institutional vision within CIRDAP subsequently evolved into a broader diplomatic initiative. The journey from a regional idea to a formally recognized **United Nations observance** reflects a remarkable convergence of institutional vision, national leadership and multilateral diplomacy. It also demonstrates how a regional organization, rooted in the realities of rural communities, can help shape the global development discourse.

3.2 The Roots: CIRDAP and the Regional Rural Development Movement

The origins of the World Rural Development Day can be traced to the international momentum surrounding agrarian reform and rural development during the 1970s.

The establishment of CIRDAP was itself part of this broader movement. A Conference of Plenipotentiaries held in Kuala Lumpur in July 1978 adopted the Agreement establishing CIRDAP. The Agreement subsequently entered into force in May 1979. CIRDAP was established as a regional, intergovernmental and autonomous organization of Asia-Pacific countries, with the initiative and support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), other UN agencies and development partners.

CIRDAP was conceived to help countries strengthen their national rural development efforts while promoting regional cooperation, exchange of experience, research, training and knowledge-sharing. Its work was closely connected to the follow-up to the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) held under FAO leadership in 1979.

This history is important because rural development was never regarded by CIRDAP simply as an agricultural issue. Its mandate has always been rooted in an integrated approach—bringing together economic opportunity, social development, infrastructure, human resources, institutional capacity, people's participation and poverty reduction.

It was against this institutional and historical background that the idea of giving rural development a dedicated global day eventually emerged.

3.3 Who Initiated World Rural Development Day?

CIRDAP was the initial proponent of the idea, while Bangladesh was the country that took the initiative to bring the proposal to the United Nations General Assembly. This distinction is explicitly recorded in the official proceedings of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly.

On 6 September 2024, while introducing the draft resolution, Bangladesh's Former Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Muhammad Abdul Muhith, stated that 6 July was the date of CIRDAP's establishment and described CIRDAP as “the organization that was the initial proponent of the day.” He explained that CIRDAP had been playing a crucial role in assisting its Member States with national rural development efforts and that the anniversary of its founding provided an appropriate date for the proposed international observance.

Thus, the institutional genesis of the idea lies with CIRDAP, while the diplomatic initiative that converted the idea into a UN observance was led by the Government of Bangladesh. This makes World Rural Development Day distinctive: it emerged from a regional rural development institution and was subsequently elevated through multilateral diplomacy to become a global United Nations observance.

3.4 Bangladesh Takes the Initiative to the United Nations

The Government of Bangladesh formally initiated the process at the United Nations during the 78th session of the General Assembly. A core group consisting of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines and Thailand tabled the draft resolution entitled World Rural Development Day. Bangladesh served as the facilitator and presented the resolution to the General Assembly.

The diplomatic process involved extensive consultations. According to Ambassador Muhith's statement to the General Assembly, the core group conducted five rounds of informal consultations in an effort to build consensus around the resolution.

The initiative subsequently attracted broad international support. The final revised draft was sponsored by countries from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and other regions. Among the additional sponsors were several CIRDAP Member States, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Pakistan, demonstrating that the proposal had evolved from a regional initiative into a broader international effort.

3.5 The Historic UN General Assembly Decision

On **6 September 2024**, the United Nations General Assembly adopted **Resolution A/RES/78/326**, formally proclaiming 6 July as World Rural Development Day. The resolution was adopted without a vote, reflecting broad support among Member States. The resolution states that the purpose of the Day is to: *highlight the critical importance of rural development and transformation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

It further recognizes the importance of locally driven development approaches and the need to share pathways and experiences that can accelerate implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. The resolution places rural development firmly within the wider global development agenda rather than treating it as a stand-alone agricultural concern.

The UN resolution connects rural development with virtually every major dimension of sustainable development. It highlights linkages between rural development and:

- poverty eradication;
- hunger and food security;
- agricultural development;
- nutrition;
- rural infrastructure;
- digital infrastructure and connectivity;
- productive employment and enterprises;
- empowerment of rural women;
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities;
- environmental sustainability;
- ecosystem restoration;
- social inclusion;
- human rights; and
- the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In his address introducing the resolution, Ambassador Muhith emphasized that integrated rural development contributes to all three dimensions of sustainable development—**economic, social and environmental**.

This is perhaps the most important conceptual contribution of World Rural Development Day: **rural development is not a sector; it is a foundation for sustainable development**.

3.6 What Does the UN Resolution Ask the World to Do?

The resolution does not create a new international programme or impose a new reporting mechanism on Member States. Instead, it establishes a platform for awareness, advocacy, knowledge exchange and concrete action.

The General Assembly invites:

- UN Member States;
- organizations of the UN system;
- international and regional organizations;
- NGOs;
- civil society;
- farmers' organizations;
- Indigenous Peoples;
- local communities;
- the private sector;

- academia; and
- schools

to observe World Rural Development Day through concrete activities, appropriate to their national and regional contexts.

This means the Day is intentionally designed to be flexible. Governments can organize national events; development organizations can hold policy dialogues; universities can conduct research and innovation activities; civil society can amplify rural voices; and communities themselves can showcase their achievements and challenges. The Day is therefore not intended merely as a ceremonial observance. It is an invitation to turn attention into action.

3.7 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

The resolution assigns an important facilitating role to the *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)*. UN DESA is invited to work with governments, international and regional organizations, UN specialized agencies and other stakeholders to facilitate the organization and implementation of World Rural Development Day.

Its responsibilities include:

1. promoting awareness of rural development;
2. highlighting the contribution of rural development to the SDGs;
3. supporting Member States in planning and coordinating activities;
4. facilitating collaboration among stakeholders; and
5. bringing global attention to rural challenges, opportunities and success stories.

The UN Secretary-General has also been requested to bring the resolution to the attention of Member States, UN organizations and other relevant stakeholders to encourage appropriate observance. Importantly, the resolution specifies that activities arising from the observance are to be financed through voluntary contributions, rather than through a new UN programme budget.

The First Official Observance: 2025

Although the resolution was adopted in September 2024, 2025, marked the first official observance of World Rural Development Day. For the inaugural observance, UN DESA promoted the theme:

“Revitalizing Rural Development: Pathways to Inclusion, Resilience and Sustainable Prosperity”

The **2025** observance highlighted the need for rural transformation that expands access to services, strengthens resilience to climate and economic shocks, mobilizes investment and supports innovation.

The UN highlighted areas including digital connectivity; renewable and green energy; agroecology; local leadership; inclusive rural economies; and community-driven innovation.

The observance was supported through online campaigns, multilingual communications and storytelling designed to bring rural voices and solutions into the global development conversation. The UN Secretary-General's office also highlighted the Day as an opportunity to elevate rural voices and renew the global commitment to *leaving no one behind, including people in the most remote communities*.

3.8 World Rural Development Day 2026: Moving from Awareness to Investment

The second observance in **2026** has taken the conversation further. The United Nations has placed the emphasis on: *“Financing the First Mile of Food Systems”*.

The concept of the “first mile” recognizes rural communities as the places where food is produced, livelihoods are sustained and resilience begins. The UN notes that rural communities are home to a very large share of the world's poorest people and are simultaneously exposed to food insecurity, climate

shocks, migration pressures and infrastructure and connectivity gaps. The 2026 focus therefore emphasizes investment in:

- rural people;
- agricultural value chains;
- cooperatives;
- rural small and medium-sized enterprises;
- access to finance;
- infrastructure;
- market connections;
- climate resilience; and
- inclusive economic opportunities.

The **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)**, the UN's specialized international financial institution focused exclusively on rural development, has also used WRDD 2026 to highlight the importance of financing rural transformation and unlocking the economic potential of rural communities. **FAO** has similarly used the Day to highlight the role of cooperatives in sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems, including through its collaboration with the International Cooperative Alliance.

This shows how World Rural Development Day is increasingly becoming a platform through which different parts of the UN system can bring their own expertise to the broader rural development agenda.

A Day, But Also a Global Call to Action

World Rural Development Day should therefore not be understood simply as another entry on the international calendar. It represents a global call to:

Recognize rural communities -- Invest in rural people -- Listen to rural voices -- Connect rural producers to markets -- Empower rural women and youth -- Strengthen rural institutions -- Promote climate resilience -- Support innovation and entrepreneurship -- Share knowledge across borders -- And ensure that no rural community is left behind.

The strength of the Day lies precisely in its ability to connect these different dimensions.

CHAPTER -4:

Celebrations of the 2nd World Rural Development Day at CIRDAP in 2026

4.1 Programme Highlights: On 6 July 2026, the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) marked a defining moment in its history, celebrating its **47th Foundation Day** alongside the **2nd Observance of World Rural Development Day (WRDD)**. Held at the CIRDAP International Conference Centre (CICC), 17 Topkhana Road, Dhaka, the occasion brought together Ministers, senior government officials, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, diplomats, representatives of international organizations and development partners, academics, civil society leaders, private-sector representatives and the media. Their presence transformed the anniversary from an institutional commemoration into a regional gathering of voices united by a common aspiration: **to build rural communities that are inclusive, resilient, prosperous and sustainable.**



The occasion carried historical significance. CIRDAP was established on 6 July 1979 as a regional intergovernmental platform dedicated to advancing integrated rural development across Asia and the Pacific. Forty-seven years later, the same date has acquired a global identity through the United Nations' proclamation of **World Rural Development Day**. The convergence of the two occasions therefore represented more than a celebration of CIRDAP's institutional journey; it symbolized the evolution of rural development from a regional priority into a recognized component of the global sustainable development agenda.

The programme was graced by His Excellency Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Honourable Minister of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of Bangladesh, as the Chief Guest and Chairperson of the CIRDAP Governing Council. Distinguished dignitaries from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Local Government Division, and the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division of the Government of Bangladesh attended the programme as Special Guest and Guests of Honour.



The ceremony opened with the address of **H.E. Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, Director General of CIRDAP**, who reflected on the Centre's journey since its establishment in 1979 and reaffirmed its enduring role as a platform for regional cooperation, policy dialogue, capacity development, innovation and knowledge exchange.



Looking beyond the achievements of the past 47 years, the Director General articulated a forward-looking vision for CIRDAP—one that seeks to expand the Centre's reach and strengthen its relevance in a rapidly changing rural development landscape. He emphasized that the challenges facing rural communities today—climate change, food insecurity, technological disruption, changing demographics, unemployment and unequal access to opportunities—cannot be addressed by countries working in isolation. They require stronger regional partnerships, shared knowledge, innovation and collective action. A significant dimension of his vision was CIRDAP's ambition to broaden its global and regional partnership base. The organization has initiated efforts to engage 40 additional non-member countries, with formal invitations extended as part of its strategy to expand the CIRDAP family and create a wider platform for cooperation on rural transformation.



This aspiration reflects a broader understanding of CIRDAP's future role. The Centre is not simply looking to preserve its legacy; it is seeking to build upon it—to connect more countries, institutions, practitioners and ideas around the shared challenge of transforming rural societies.



The significance of the occasion was reinforced by **H.E. Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Hon'ble Minister of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of Bangladesh, and Chairperson of the CIRDAP Governing Council**, who attended as Chief Guest.

In his address, the Minister placed rural development firmly at the centre of Bangladesh's development vision. His central message was unequivocal: development must

be inclusive, equitable and rural-centric. Genuine prosperity, he stressed, cannot be achieved if cities move forward while villages are left behind. For Bangladesh, this message carries particular significance. The country's economic and social transformation has been closely connected to the progress of its rural population. Rural communities remain central to agriculture and food security, while rural enterprises, cooperatives, small producers, women and young people continue to contribute significantly to the country's economy and social fabric.

The Minister also highlighted the importance of strengthening the connection between rural development and emerging global challenges. Climate change, digital transformation, food security and youth unemployment are reshaping rural realities across the Asia-Pacific region. These challenges, he noted, require new approaches that combine infrastructure and services with economic empowerment, innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience. In this context, he reaffirmed the importance of CIRDAP's role in promoting climate-resilient agriculture and rural entrepreneurship and in strengthening cooperation among its Member Countries. He also underscored the historical significance of World Rural Development Day itself. Bangladesh, he noted, takes particular pride in having played a leading role in bringing international recognition to 6 July as World Rural Development Day. The observance, therefore, represents not only an international recognition of



rural development but also a reflection of Bangladesh's longstanding commitment to rural transformation and its partnership with CIRDAP.

4.2 Celebrating Knowledge: Launching Two Flagship Publications

The celebration also underscored the importance of knowledge as a driver of rural transformation through the unveiling of two major CIRDAP publications.



The first, *Integrated Rural Development Models: 100 Best Practices and Innovations from Asia-Pacific and Beyond*, brings together 100 examples from 22 countries, documenting approaches that demonstrate how rural communities are responding creatively to challenges related to sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, digital transformation, community empowerment and inclusive development.

The second publication, *Unstoppable Spirits: The Rise of Rural Women in Asia and the Pacific*, places rural women at the centre of the development narrative. Through stories from CIRDAP Member Countries, the publication highlights women who are transforming their communities through agriculture, livestock, beekeeping, dairy farming, homestay enterprises, food processing, marketing and social leadership.



These publication goes beyond presenting success stories. It is intended as a practical knowledge resource for policymakers, researchers, academics, rural development practitioners and development partners—reflecting CIRDAP's longstanding commitment to learning from experience and facilitating South-South and regional knowledge exchange.

4.3 From Ideas to Impact: Celebrating Rural Innovation

A highlight of the celebration was the announcement of the *15 winners of the CIRDAP–REEDS International Rural Innovation Challenge 2026*, honouring inspiring and transformative rural innovations from across the Asia-Pacific region.



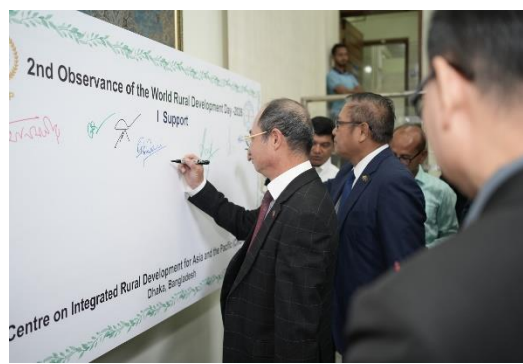
The programme also celebrated **five exceptional rural innovations** from Bangladesh, the host country of CIRDAP, with Special Mention for their outstanding ingenuity, impact and potential to address pressing rural development challenges. These remarkable innovations exemplify the spirit of rural transformation—turning local ideas into meaningful solutions, strengthening rural livelihoods, and paving the way towards vibrant, prosperous and happy rural communities.

4.4 Signature Campaign: Reaffirming the collective commitment



The celebration concluded with a Signature Campaign, in which the distinguished guests reaffirmed their collective commitment to promoting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable rural development across the region. The signature campaign, initiated by CIRDAP, aims to garner widespread support and recognition for rural communities. This move is a part of CIRDAP's broader mission to advocate for and support rural development through innovative programs, policy advocacy, and partnerships

across Asia and the Pacific region. This campaign will run throughout the year 2026. Honourable Ministers, Diplomats of CIRDAP Member Countries and other Asia-Pacific Countries, Ministry officials, International Organizations, Rural Development Organizations, NGOs and CIRDAP Experts were pledged their support in the signature campaign.



CHAPTER -5:

Celebrations in CIRDAP Member Countries (CMC)

5.1 CIRDAP Member countries: Turning a Day into a Development Platform: The long-term significance of World Rural Development Day (WRDD) is steadily evolving, transforming its annual communications event into a dynamic and enduring development platform. Through this process, CIRDAP is emerging as a regional architecture for sustained collaboration, knowledge exchange and collective action for rural transformation across Asia and the Pacific. CIRDAP's Member States, national contact institutions, link institutions, universities, research organizations, development partners and rural development practitioners provide a strong foundation for advancing this shared vision.

With the true spirit and driven by a collective and utmost commitment to reaching far reached and marginalized rural communities, CIRDAP Member Countries came together to commemorate WRDD 2026 through a diverse range of national and community-level activities: notably Myanmar, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Fiji, India and Pakistan actively observed the World Rural Development Day 2026, demonstrating their commitment in placing rural communities at the center of sustainable development. The National and Community Leaders, general people and development organizations reaffirmed and committed themselves towards the betterment of the rural lives through empowering and building resilient, inclusive and prosperous rural societies.

5.2 Myanmar: The Department of Rural Development under the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, Myanmar, officially celebrated national observance of World Rural Development Day (WRDD) 2026 in Myanmar. The celebration, was held in Nay Pyi Taw, brought together approximately 334 dignitaries, including Union Ministers, Deputy Ministers, senior government officials, representatives of international and non-governmental organizations, and cooperative societies. At the event, the Union Minister for Cooperatives and Rural Development H.E U Myo Zaw Thein delivered a special message from His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. As part of the commemoration, a tree-planting initiative involving 500 participants planting 500 trees organized in a designated village in Nay Pyi Taw, alongside simultaneous tree-planting activities across townships nationwide. The Director General (DG) of CIRDAP's insightful video message regarding the celebration of the 2nd World Rural Development Day was also showcased during the celebration event in Myanmar.



5.3 Malaysia: Malaysia officially observed World Rural Development Day (WRDD) 2026 for the first time on 6 July 2026 in the country. In conjunction with the observance, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Rural and Regional Development, H.E Datuk Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, reaffirmed the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development's (KKDW) commitment to advancing a comprehensive rural development agenda. The country celebrated the event for the first time at the Tun Abdul Razak Stadium in Jengka, near Maran, Pahang, focusing on three main pillars: community innovation, rural



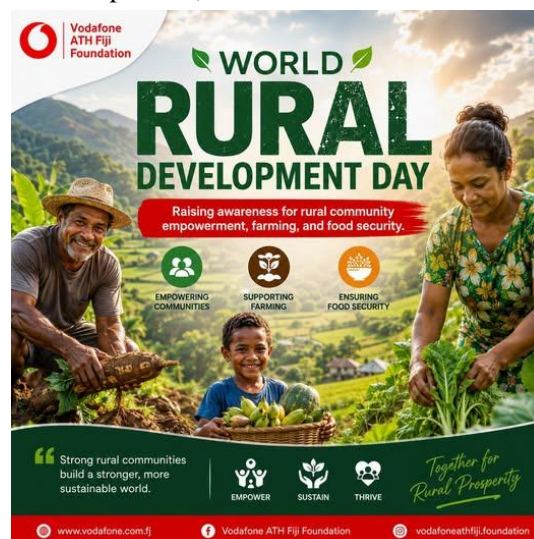
digitalization and rural entrepreneurship development.

The Deputy Prime Minister emphasized that the Government of Malaysia will continue its efforts to ensure that rural community's benefit from expanded opportunities, strengthened economic resilience, improved infrastructure and services, and a more prosperous future aligned with the nation's development aspirations. He further noted that the annual observance of 6 July will serve as a platform to recognize the invaluable contributions of rural communities while elevating the importance of rural development at both the national and regional levels. The Deputy Prime Minister highlighted the historical significance of the date, noting that 6 July coincides with the establishment of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), which has played a pivotal role in promoting rural development across the Asia-Pacific region. He also conveyed his greetings to all Malaysians on the occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, celebrated under the theme "Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities."

5.4 Bangladesh: The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives of Bangladesh organized the first National Rural Development Day of the country in Dhaka on July 6, 2026. The theme of the national day is 'A developed and prosperous country with rich rural areas, Bangladesh comes first'. LGRD and Cooperatives Minister H.E Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir attended as Chief Guest; and inaugurated the event and launched a commemorative postage stamp. During this national celebration, the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) arranged a colourful rally and hosted exhibition stalls showcasing six decades of its rural development milestones.



5.5 FIJI: Fiji commemorated World Rural Development Day (WRDD) 2026 as part of a national programme led by Prime Minister Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka, alongside the commissioning of the newly constructed Nadarivatu Government Station, refurbished staff quarters, and the launch of the 2026 Government Roadshow. Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister underscored the vital contribution of rural communities to Fiji's economic and social development and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to inclusive rural transformation. Reflecting the global WRDD 2026 theme, "Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities," he emphasized that empowering rural communities through improved infrastructure, accessible public services, knowledge, market opportunities, and financial support is essential for sustainable economic growth and achieving Fiji's Vision 2050. The observance also highlighted the Government's continued efforts to decentralize services, strengthen community resilience, and ensure that rural and maritime communities remain at the center of the country's national development agenda.



5.6 India: On the occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, CIRDAP's Link institute in India, NIRD-PR commenced the international study tour on Adaptive Social Protection for 27 delegates from National Cash Transfer Office, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation of Nigeria. The programme is headed by Dr. Abdulkarim Abubakar Ozi, Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy. The program was funded by the Supreme Management Training & Consultancy Services Limited Nigeria. The study tour comprised of high-quality learning and experience-sharing sessions, as well as curated field visits to social protection initiatives, to provide delegates with rich, practical insights into India's approach to adaptive, inclusive, and scalable social protection systems.



Building on the spirit of South-South cooperation, this high-level Study Tour on Sustainable Adaptive Social Protection oriented the delegates from the Nigerian Cash Transfer Project (NCTP) domiciled under the National Social Investment Programme Agency (NSIPA), in the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Nigeria to social protection programs in India.



The technical learning and experience-sharing sessions, and targeted field visits will build strong alignment with Nigeria's ongoing reforms in poverty alleviation and social protection. The tour will also build potential for future learning and collaboration to advance the

Sustainable Development agenda in Global South.

5.7 Pakistan: Chief Minister of the Sindh province, Pakistan, Mr. Syed Murad Ali Shah issued a message for World Rural Development Day on July 6, 2026, stating that investing in rural areas is equivalent to investing in a secure and sustainable future for the nation. In his message on World Rural Development Day, the chief minister said empowering rural areas is essential for securing the country's future. He highlighted the vital role of farmers and rural communities in ensuring economic growth and food security, adding that the Sindh government is implementing initiatives to reduce rural poverty, create employment opportunities and promote agricultural development.

CHAPTER -6:

Championing of Rural Transformation: Perspectives from Policy Makers, Administrators, Experts and Partner Institutions of CIRDAP Member Countries

MALAYSIA

Building Rural Futures: Malaysia's Journey Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Nation

By H.E. Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia & Minister of Rural and Regional Development, Malaysia

As the global community commemorates World Rural Development Day 2026 under the theme “Toward Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities,” - we are reminded that rural development is not merely about building roads, bridges or basic infrastructure. It is about building lives. It is about creating opportunities, strengthening communities and ensuring that no one is left behind in the journey of national progress.

For Malaysia, rural development has always been more than a policy agenda. It is a national commitment.

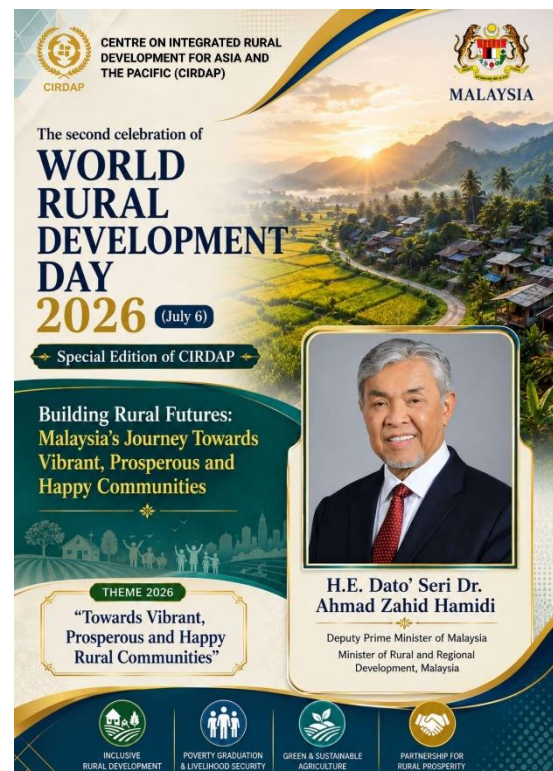
Our rural communities are not passive recipients of development. They are the backbone of national resilience, the guardians of our values and active contributors to Malaysia's economic and social progress. With this conviction, Malaysia continues to pursue a comprehensive and integrated approach through the **National Rural Development Policy 2030**, which provides a long-term framework for inclusive, sustainable and future-ready rural development for Malaysia's 8.1 million rural population.

Malaysia's experience has shown that true rural transformation cannot be measured by physical infrastructure alone. Roads, bridges, housing, water supply, electricity and connectivity remain essential foundations. But beyond these, we must continue to strengthen human capital, expand economic opportunities and enhance the overall well-being of rural communities.

Over the years, Malaysia has made meaningful progress in improving rural connectivity and access to essential services. At the same time, entrepreneurship development programmes, community-based economic initiatives and digital commerce platforms have enabled rural entrepreneurs to reach wider markets and create new sources of income.

We have also placed strong emphasis on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), youth development, women's empowerment and lifelong learning. These efforts are important to ensure that rural communities are not left behind in a world increasingly shaped by knowledge, technology and innovation.

The impact of these comprehensive interventions is clearly reflected in our socio-economic progress. Over the past five decades, we have witnessed a profound transformation in rural well-being, with the average monthly gross household income in rural areas rising remarkably from just RM200 in 1970 to



RM5,669 in 2024. This upward trajectory is a testament to our unwavering commitment to uplifting rural livelihoods.

Equally significant is the positive shift in our demographic trends. Between 2022 and 2024, the migration flow from rural to urban areas declined sharply from 2.4% to 0.5%. This growing retention of our rural population is a clear indicator that our efforts to expand viable employment opportunities and enhance modern facilities are successfully transforming our rural areas into attractive, thriving places to live and work.

One important lesson from Malaysia's rural development journey is that there is no single model for transformation. Every village, district and rural community has its own strengths, resources and aspirations. Effective rural policies must therefore be grounded in local realities, while unlocking the potential that already exists within the community itself.

As we look ahead, rural development will continue to face a rapidly changing landscape shaped by climate change, technological disruption, demographic shifts and global economic uncertainty. These challenges require governments and development partners to be more adaptive, innovative and collaborative.

In Malaysia, we are increasingly leveraging digital technologies, data-driven planning and new innovations to improve policy design and service delivery. But while tools and technologies may change, our guiding principle remains the same: development must always be people-centred, inclusive and sustainable.

At the heart of Malaysia's rural development journey is a simple belief - development should ultimately be measured by the lives it improves, the opportunities it creates and the hope it inspires.

Success is not defined only by the number of projects completed, but by the extent to which rural communities are empowered to shape a better future for themselves, their families and the generations to come.

As we celebrate World Rural Development Day 2026, Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to working closely with regional and international partners, including CIRDAP, in advancing innovative and sustainable rural development solutions.

Together, we must continue to build rural communities that are vibrant, prosperous, resilient and prosper.

MYANMAR

Empowering Rural Communities, Bridging Divides, and Building a Prosperous Myanmar for All

H.E Myo Zaw Thein, Union Minister, Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar

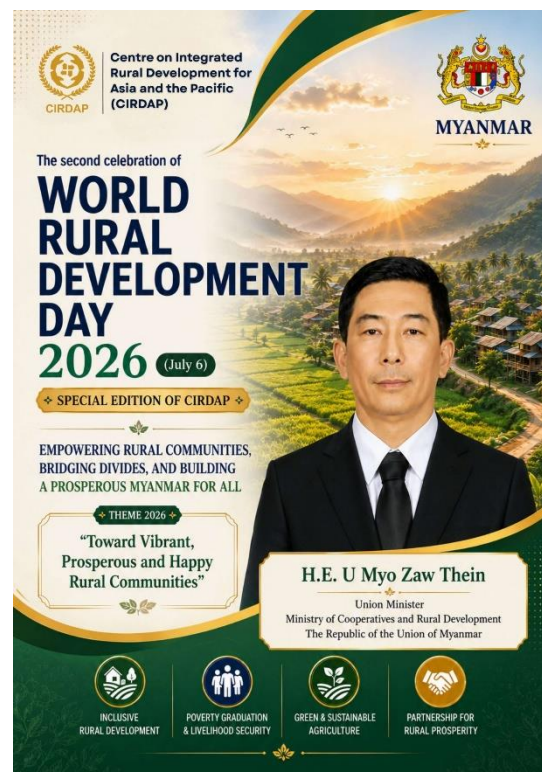
On the auspicious occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, I deem it a profound privilege to convey my warmest greetings to the international community and esteemed fellow member nations of CIRDAP. Representing the Republic of the Union of Myanmar at the highest policy level, I reaffirm our sovereign commitment to regional solidarity and strategic policy alignment as the vital mechanisms to transform collective political resolve into permanent, structural poverty eradication.

This year's global initiative, **"Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities,"** marks an essential paradigm shift in state-level governance and ministerial oversight. True national progress cannot be measured solely by physical asset delivery or basic macroeconomic indices. True peace, stability, and shared prosperity are achieved only when development empowers rural communities as primary growth drivers rather than passive beneficiaries, securing genuine human dignity, social cohesion, and well-being. Achieving this sovereign vision requires transforming structural equity into community-led economic autonomy. State-led investments must empower smallholder producers, guarantee direct local management over essential rural infrastructure, and structurally integrate localized production networks into regional market value chains.

With approximately 70 percent of Myanmar's population residing in rural areas, rural transformation sits at the absolute heart of our nation-building agenda. Social equity is more than a policy objective; it is the cornerstone of our administration's mandate to ensure that every citizen possesses equal access to essential services and economic opportunities.

In alignment with institutional best practices, the Myanmar Rural Development Strategic Framework executes integrated operations across **five mutually reinforcing activities** designed to narrow the rural-urban divide: enhancing rural transport connectivity and expanding solar energy access, ensuring access to safe and secure water supplies for all rural communities, uplifting the standards and quality of rural education, strengthening rural healthcare services and infrastructure to promote community well-being, and accelerating rural economic development by revitalizing the cooperative system as a modern engine for economic inclusion. Through a systematic group formation and product selection methodology, this framework effectively transitions smallholders from subsistence to commercial success.

To operationalize these models, the Department of Rural Development under the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development deploys its core development programs through its flagship SMART Village Project across states and regions. This cohesive framework integrates our strategic pillars across six cores mutually reinforcing sectors: infrastructure, financial inputs, livelihood enhancement, institutional capacity building, social protection, and environmental conservation. By



integrating this model with our data-driven Village Development Planning (VDP) Programme, we drive community-led participatory rural development and foster sustainable, community-managed activities. This transparent, bottom-up framework eliminates top-down planning misalignments and ensures complete administrative accountability.

The complex challenges of rural poverty eradication and climate adaptation cannot be solved by any nation operating in isolation. Within our borders, Myanmar is actively pioneering area-focused integrated rural development projects to address these issues. To scale these efforts, we welcome strategic collaborations and stand ready to work hand-in-hand with international partners to achieve sustainable global development.

In strict alignment with this year's theme, "**Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities**," Myanmar will continue to implement targeted village development project activities with renewed momentum. I extend my warmest wishes for the shared prosperity, resilience, and happiness of all rural communities across the Asia-Pacific region.

IR IRAN

IR IRAN's Vision: Together We Grow, Together We Prosper

*By H.E Dr. Gholamreza Nouri Ghezleji,
Honourable Minister of Agricultural Jihad, Islamic
Republic of Iran*

In the Name of God

Message from the Minister of Agricultural Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Occasion of the International Day of Rural Development (2026) – Theme 2026: *“Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities”*

Amid the profound sorrow and grief brought about by the recent circumstances in my country which is observing a period of national mourning following the martyrdom of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I am sending a message on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Development and under this year's inspiring theme, “Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities,” to CIRDAP, member countries, including the governments, peoples, rural communities, and all those dedicated to rural development across the CIRDAP Member States.

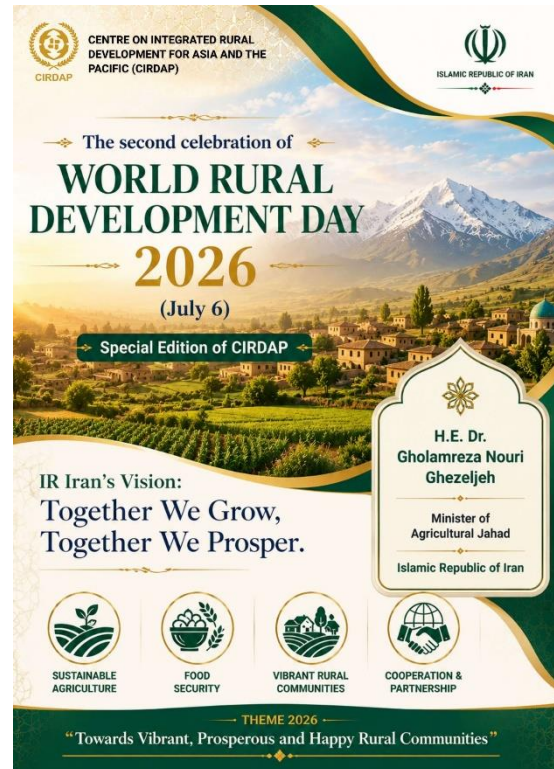
We firmly believe that even in difficult times, development, solidarity, and cooperation among nations keep the light of hope alive. Rural development remains one of the strongest pathways toward achieving food security, prosperity, and sustainable development.

Today, the world is facing complex challenges, including climate change, the depletion of natural resources, economic volatility, food insecurity, and regional crises. These challenges have highlighted, more than ever, the importance of investing in rural development and strengthening the resilience of food systems.

In recent months, the Islamic Republic of Iran has also experienced difficult circumstances. During this period, Iranian rural communities, farmers, and nomads demonstrated remarkable commitment, resilience, and dedication by maintaining agricultural production and ensuring the continued supply of essential food products. Once again, they proved that the resilience of rural communities forms the foundation of food security and constitutes a key pillar of national stability and sustainable development. This experience has further reinforced our commitment to strengthening rural infrastructure, supporting agricultural producers, and enhancing the preparedness of local communities to respond to future crises.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that realizing the vision of 2026 theme, **“Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities”** requires stronger regional cooperation, knowledge and experience sharing, human capacity development, technology transfer, and enhanced partnerships among governments, academic institutions, the private sector, and local communities.

In this regard, we sincerely appreciate the valuable efforts of CIRDAP in promoting regional cooperation and strengthening the capacities of its Member States. The Islamic Republic of Iran



reaffirms its readiness to expand scientific, technical, and practical cooperation, particularly in the areas of sustainable agriculture, food security, the empowerment of rural women and youth, natural resource management, and innovation in rural development.

Today, more than ever, we share a common responsibility to build rural communities where prosperity, hope, justice, and opportunity are accessible to all communities that not only ensure food security but also lay the foundation for sustainable development and lasting peace for future generations.

In closing, I once again extend my congratulations to all CIRDAP Member States, as well as to farmers, rural communities, nomads, researchers, and rural development practitioners on this important occasion. I sincerely hope that through closer cooperation and stronger partnerships, we will witness the emergence of vibrant, prosperous, and happy rural communities throughout Asia and the Pacific.

On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I reaffirm our commitment to friendship and constructive cooperation with all CIRDAP Member States. We firmly believe that a sustainable future will be built upon vibrant, prosperous, and hopeful rural communities.

With best wishes and GOD's blessing,

LAO PDR

No One Left Behind, Every Village Empowered ‘Lao PDR: Vibrant villages, Resilient people, Prosperous nation’

H.E Dr. Linkham Douangsavanh, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lao PDR

On the historic occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, the Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and on behalf of Ministry of Agriculture and Environment extends its warmest congratulations and highest appreciation to the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP). We are honored to contribute to this Special Edition, celebrating our shared vision of transforming rural landscapes into thriving, resilient, and inclusive communities.

For Lao PDR, rural development is not merely a sector—it is the cornerstone of our national identity and the engine of our sustainable socio-economic growth. As we embark on our 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2026–2030), our primary goal remains clear: to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, ensuring that no one is left behind as we schedule to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026.



In recent years, Lao PDR has achieved milestone transformations by adopting an integrated, nature-positive approach to rural upliftment. A historic institutional reform merged our agricultural and environmental sectors into a singular Ministry of Agriculture and Environment. This milestone has empowered us to plan and manage agriculture, land use, forestry, and climate resilience under one holistic framework. Guided by Decree No. 348 on Poverty Graduation and Development, we have successfully established integrated rural development models across dozens of focal areas nationwide, directly improving local governance, infrastructure, and livelihood security in remote regions. Our progress is driven by a deep commitment to human capital and green economic development. In collaboration with our global partners, Lao PDR has drastically expanded rural healthcare and social protection systems, achieving record heights in national immunization coverage and digital civil registration for newborn children. Furthermore, we have successfully launched our National Action Plan to Transform Food Systems (2025–2030). This strategic roadmap directly counters global economic volatility by promoting green agricultural innovations. By scaling up high-quality regional commodities—such as our celebrated Khao Kai Noi rice and Bolaven coffee—we are elevating smallholder incomes and bolstering rural food security.

None of these achievements would be possible without strong regional solidarity. CIRDAP’s steadfast advocacy for integrated systems continues to serve as an invaluable pillar of support for our national policies. As we look ahead to the remaining years of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, Lao PDR stands ready to deepen its collaboration with CIRDAP and its member states. Together, we will continue to exchange knowledge, empower our rural youth and women, and foster a green, prosperous future for the millions who call the rural Asia-Pacific home. Thank you, and happy World Rural Development Day 2026. --ສະເໜີ ພະແນກຂ່າວສານ, ຫ້ອງການ ຊ່ວຍຊອກຮູບ ທ່ານ ລມຕ ຄັດຕິດ ເພື່ອປະກອບໃສ່ບົດຄວາມດັ່ງກ່າວ.

PHILIPPINES

Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Philippines: Empowering & Strengthening Rural Communities, and Advancing Inclusive Development for a More Prosperous Nation

H.E Mr. Conrado M. Estrella III, DAR Secretary, Department of Agrarian Reform, Republic of the Philippines

Warm greetings as we celebrate World Rural Development Day.

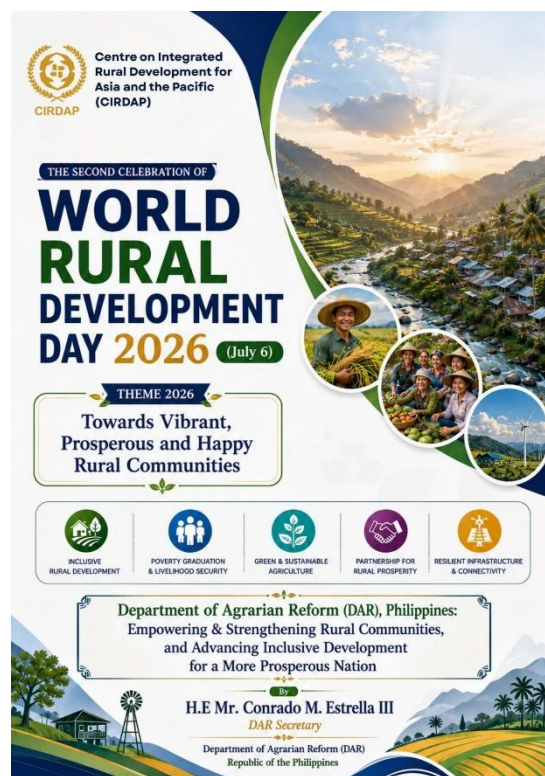
This occasion honours the dedication of our farmers, fisherfolk, rural workers, and local communities as the backbone of our nation's progress. It also recognizes the significant work remaining, as these communities continue to confront systemic challenges such as poverty, limited resource access, and infrastructure disparities.

To bridge the gap between rural and urban realities, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) reaffirms its commitment to sustainable rural development through three interconnected pillars: land tenure security, support services, and socio-economic development.

Through land distribution and parcelization, DAR addresses historical landlessness by transferring agricultural lands to qualified beneficiaries, while its agrarian justice programs provide legal protection and dispute resolution to safeguard them from eviction. Building on these, DAR strengthens rural livelihoods by equipping farmers with training in sustainable agriculture, cooperative development, and climate resilience, while facilitating access to credit, microfinance, and modern farming technologies. Through initiatives like the Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty (PAHP) program, Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Organizations (ARBOs) supply fresh produce directly to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) feeding programs and Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) facilities, creating stable income opportunities and supporting food security.

DAR's 2026 initiatives focus on land distribution, debt condonation, and climate-resilient agribusiness. From July 2022 to April 2026, the agency distributed 398,316 land titles covering 538,802 hectares to 366,332 Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) nationwide. DAR also continues to implement Republic Act No. 11953, or the New Agrarian Emancipation Act, erasing billions in outstanding principal loans, unpaid amortizations, and interests directly increasing farmers' disposable income. Beyond land distribution, DAR has also invested in infrastructure, completing 219 irrigation projects, constructing 517 farm-to-market roads, and distributing 11,509 farm machineries and equipment as of April 2026, to protect rural livelihoods against erratic weather patterns and transfer isolated rural communities' produce to urban markets.

To ensure land ownership results in sustainable livelihoods, DAR has intensified agricultural value chain development. In partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and other Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) agencies, DAR launched the country's first CARP-Tindahan in Asingan, Pangasinan early this year, providing farmers with direct retail spaces to market



products without intermediaries. This pilot serves as a scalable model for nationwide rural enterprise development.

Additionally, on April 8, 2026, DAR and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) signed the P8.09-billion Value Chain Innovation for Sustainable Transformation (VISTA) Project, co-funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This is a six-year program aiming to reduce rural poverty and enhance food security and climate resilience in upland communities by supporting sustainable coffee and cacao value chains for 80,000 smallholder households across 112 communities in Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) and SOCCSKSARGEN, prioritizing women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth.

These are actionable steps we continue to advance-moving beyond the mere recognition of rural communities as the bedrock of our global society toward empowering rural populations to build resilient, self-sufficient, self-sufficient, and thriving rural landscapes.

BANGLADESH

Transforming Rural Bangladesh: History, Institutions, and Development Pathways

*By Mohammad Showkat Rashid Chowdhury,
Secretary Rural Development & Cooperatives
Division, Ministry of Local Government Rural
Development & Cooperatives, Bangladesh*

1. Introduction

The United Nations' declaration of World Rural Development Day¹ reflects a growing global recognition that, despite rapid urbanization, rural communities remain indispensable to food security, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, and inclusive economic growth. For developing countries, rural development is no longer viewed merely as an agricultural concern; rather, it is increasingly recognized as a strategic pathway for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

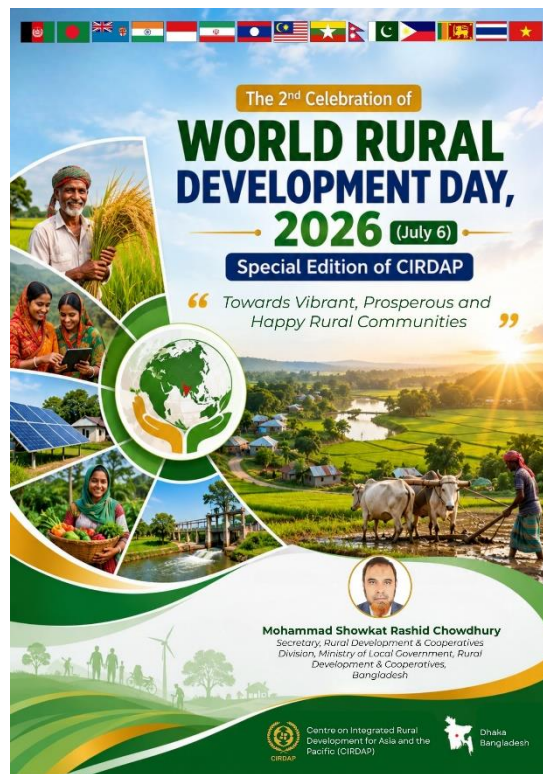
Bangladesh represents one of the most compelling examples of successful rural transformation in the contemporary developing world. At independence in 1971, Bangladesh faced formidable challenges in rebuilding its rural economy and improving the livelihoods of millions of rural households (Bertocci, 1976; Kabir et al., 2022). Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in agricultural productivity, food security, rural infrastructure, health, education, poverty reduction, and women's empowerment. The expansion of a dynamic non-farm rural economy has further accelerated growth.

This transformation did not occur spontaneously. Rather, it emerged through institutional innovation, cooperative development, community participation, and partnerships among government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners. Central to this process has been the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RD CD) under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C), which has played a pivotal role in shaping rural development strategies and overseeing key institutions responsible for poverty alleviation, cooperative development, and empowering rural people. This article examines the historical evolution of rural development in Bangladesh, with particular attention to the institutional architecture led by the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RD CD).

2. Historical Evolution of Rural Development in Bangladesh

The evolution of rural development in Bangladesh reflects a gradual transition from an agrarian economy characterized by poverty and institutional weaknesses to a more organized and integrated approach to rural transformation.

During the colonial period, rural society was dominated by the Zamindari system, which concentrated land ownership in the hands of landlords and left many peasants economically vulnerable. Limited investment in rural infrastructure, irrigation, healthcare, and institutional finance further constrained rural development and productivity.



Following the partition of British India in 1947, the government of Pakistan recognized the need for a more systematic approach to rural development. One of the earliest initiatives was the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) Programme launched in 1953 to promote community participation, agricultural improvement, and local leadership. A major milestone came in 1959 with the introduction of the Comilla Model at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development under the leadership of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. The model integrated agricultural modernization, rural infrastructure, cooperative development, and local governance, and later became an internationally recognized approach to rural development.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, rural development became a national priority due to widespread poverty, food shortages, and economic disruption. The government adopted policies aimed at increasing agricultural production, improving food security, and reducing rural poverty. In the same year, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched to organize small farmers into cooperatives and improve their access to credit, agricultural inputs, extension services, and modern farming technologies. The programme also played a significant role in disseminating Green Revolution technologies, contributing to increased agricultural productivity and rural economic growth.

Following the early post-independence rural development initiatives, Bangladesh gradually transitioned from project-based interventions to a more comprehensive and institutionalized approach to rural transformation. A significant milestone in this process was the establishment of the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD) in 1982 under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. As the apex government body responsible for rural development policy and coordination, the RDCD has provided strategic direction and oversight for a wide range of programs and institutions working to improve rural livelihoods. The following section examines this institutional framework in greater detail.

3. Institutional Framework for Rural Development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's institutional framework for rural development is a multi-layered system that translates national development priorities into grassroots action through coordinated institutions. At the apex, the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD) provides policy direction, inter-agency coordination, and overall oversight of the rural and cooperative sectors. Under its leadership, a network of specialized organizations supports rural transformation through research, capacity building, service delivery, and poverty reduction programmes. This integrated structure links policy, implementation, and innovation, ensuring a coherent approach to rural development. The following section briefly examines the key institutions and their respective roles in this framework.

3.1 Role of the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD)

Established in 1982, the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD) is the principal government agency responsible for formulating policies, coordinating programmes, and providing administrative oversight for rural development and cooperative activities in Bangladesh. Operating under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, RDCD plays a pivotal role in promoting poverty reduction, rural economic growth, employment generation, and community empowerment. Its mandate encompasses the formulation of rural development policies, cooperative laws and regulations, and the implementation of programmes aimed at enhancing rural livelihoods and self-reliance (Ahmed & Tuzon, 2005).

The National Rural Development Policy (NRDP) provides the overarching policy framework for coordinated rural development in Bangladesh. The policy emphasizes integrated planning, institutional coordination, poverty reduction, local participation, and sustainable rural livelihoods. The Rural Development and Co-operatives Division plays a central role in facilitating the implementation of this policy framework.

The Division serves as the central authority for the promotion and regulation of cooperative societies, encompassing cooperative-based marketing systems, banking and insurance services, as well as

agricultural and small-scale industrial enterprises. Through targeted interventions such as microcredit provision, savings mobilization, entrepreneurship development, and value-chain enhancement, the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD) seeks to stimulate rural production and expand self-employment opportunities. Strong emphasis is also placed on human resource development through structured training, capacity-building, and skills enhancement programmes. In addition, the Division supports the diversification of both farm and non-farm economic activities, thereby contributing to a more resilient and sustained rural economy. RDCD supervises the following network of specialized institutions:

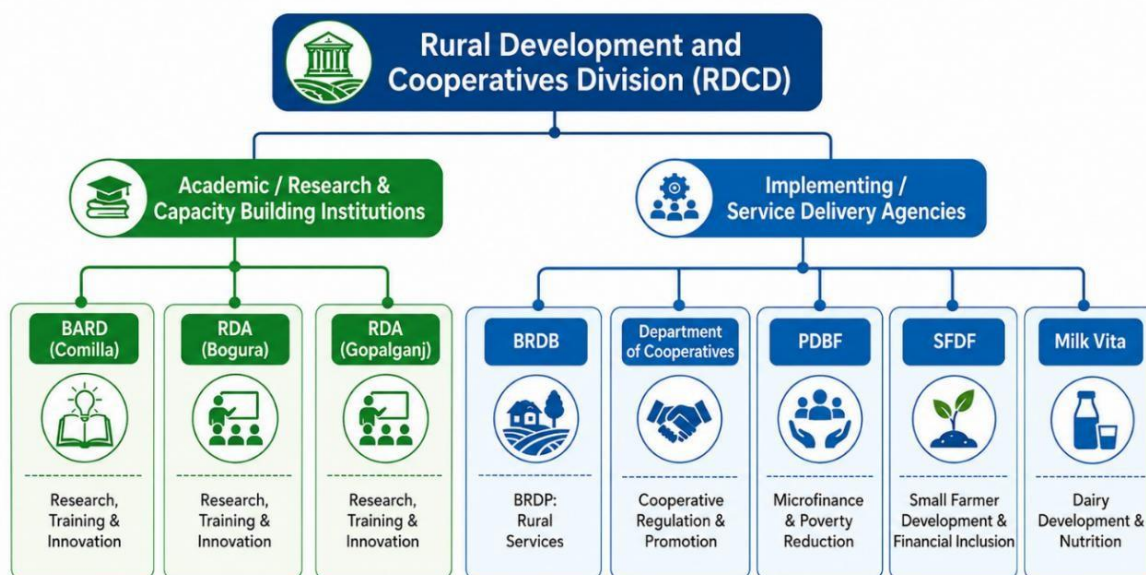


Figure 1. Institutional Framework of Rural Development under RDCD

3.2 BARD and Institutionalization of Rural Development: The Comilla Model

The formal institutionalization of rural development in Bangladesh can be traced back to the 1950s. One of the earliest initiatives was the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) Programme, introduced in 1953 to encourage community participation in rural development through local-level initiatives. However, its impact remained limited, largely due to its top-down implementation approach, which restricted meaningful grassroots engagement and weakened its effectiveness in achieving sustained rural transformation.

A major turning point came in 1959 with the establishment of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) in Comilla under the leadership of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. BARD pioneered an action-research approach by developing the Comilla “laboratory area,” where development interventions were systematically tested, refined, and evaluated before wider replication. Its methodology placed strong emphasis on grassroots participation, the development of local leadership, and evidence-based experimentation.

Through sustained action research, experimentation, and close engagement with rural communities, BARD developed the Comilla Model as an integrated framework for rural development comprising four core components. Although their structures and implementation mechanisms evolved considerably over time, the fundamental principles of these innovations profoundly influenced Bangladesh’s rural development trajectory. Following figure illustrates the evolution, institutional transformation, and enduring legacy of the Comilla Model.

Comilla Approach to Rural Development

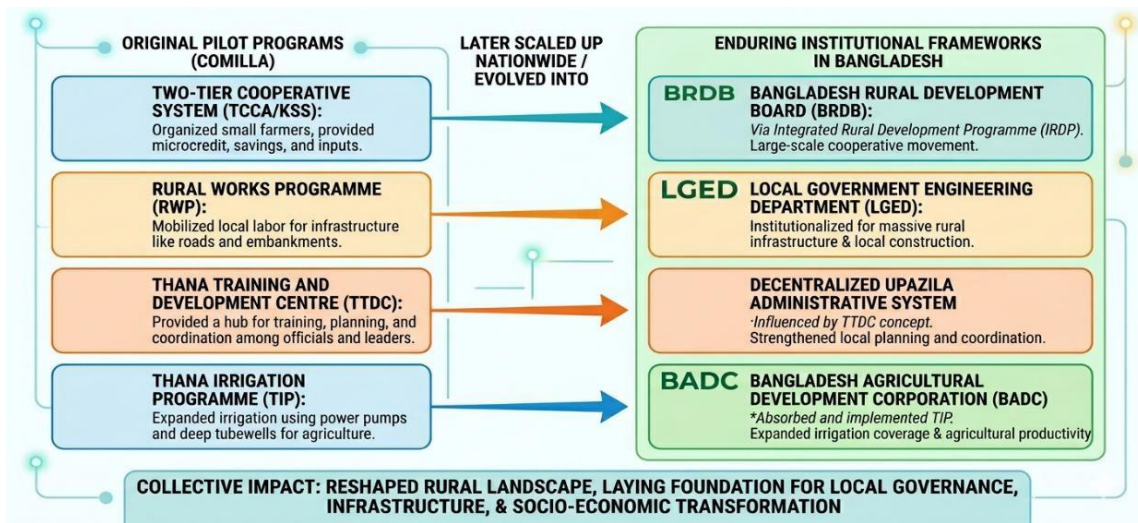


Figure 2. Evolution and Institutional Legacy of the Comilla Model

3.3 Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)

Following a 1980 World Bank evaluation, the IRDP was upgraded via ordinance into BRDB in 1982 to institutionalize the two-tier cooperative system. BRDB is the nation's largest institutional network for rural development, organizing marginal farmers into cooperatives to deploy agricultural inputs and credit programs. BRDB utilizes a Bottom-up Planning approach, pioneered through the internationally recognized "Link Model" and Participatory Rural Development Projects. It operates through the Union Coordination Committee Meeting (UCCM)—acting as a grassroots Mini-Parliament to ensure community participation, transparency, and administrative accountability (BRDB, 2024). BRDB, evolved from the IRDP and Comilla Model, significantly boosted agricultural productivity through expanded cooperatives, mechanized irrigation, credit delivery, and training systems, contributing to higher crop yields and rural modernization. It also influenced the creation of institutions like PDBF, supporting targeted poverty reduction and women's development, though equity challenges persisted (Toufique, 2017).

3.4 Department of Cooperatives (DoC)

The Department of Cooperatives, operating under the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division, serves as the principal statutory authority responsible for the promotion, regulation, and supervision of the cooperative movement in Bangladesh. The cooperative tradition gained momentum during the pre-independence period through pioneering initiatives such as the Comilla Model. Following independence in 1971, cooperatives received constitutional recognition under Article 13(b) as one of the fundamental forms of ownership.

Over time, the cooperative movement has become a cornerstone of rural development in Bangladesh. Through cooperative registration, training, auditing, and governance support, the Department of Cooperatives promotes capital formation, enterprise development, and social inclusion. These efforts have contributed to poverty reduction, employment generation, financial inclusion, and agricultural modernization.

3.5 Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogura

The Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogura, established on 19 June 1974, is a premier institution in Bangladesh dedicated to rural development training, research, and action research, particularly in the northern region. It was created to promote evidence-based development through field experimentation, capacity building, and innovative poverty reduction strategies. Over the years, RDA has played a pioneering role in designing and testing irrigation management, agricultural diversification, rural infrastructure, char development, and poverty alleviation. The Academy has introduced several nationally and internationally recognized innovations that have contributed to rural development in Bangladesh. These can be summarized as follows (RDA, 2024):

- Women in Seed Entrepreneurship (WISE) model
- Char development initiatives (M4C programme)
- Buried pipe irrigation system
- Dual-use deep tube well technology
- Low-cost multipurpose irrigation models

3.6 Small Farmers Development Foundation (SFDF)

Initially proposed by the FAO as an action-research project, the Small Farmers Development Project (SFDP) was introduced in 1978 and executed by BARD using a targeted, group-oriented approach. Aimed at the bottom 50% of the rural population, specifically landless laborers and smallholders, the initiative bypassed traditional elites by building local "receiving units".

Crucially, the project pioneered **Bangladesh's first collateral-free credit mechanism** by establishing a Guarantee-cum-Risk Fund with Janata Bank, unlocking credit disbursed at ten times the fund's value. Operating through disciplined, small informal groups (5–7 members) and micro-savings, the strategy focuses on capital formation to transition beneficiaries into a "risk-free credit zone," ensuring sustained income generation and market linkages (Bari, 1996).

Building upon this foundation, the Small Farmers Development Foundation (SFDF) continues to implement microfinance, savings mobilization, entrepreneurship development, and livelihood enhancement programmes targeting marginalized rural households across Bangladesh. The organization remains an important institutional mechanism for financial inclusion and poverty reduction in rural areas (SFDF, 2024).

3.7 Conclusion

While Bangladesh's rural transformation has yielded remarkable socioeconomic outcomes, the ongoing challenge lies in the "multiplicity of institutions". Dozens of line ministries (such as Agriculture, Land, and Fisheries & Livestock) operate parallel to the RDCD, often leading to uncoordinated, segmented, and duplicated efforts at both macro and micro levels. To foster a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable rural economy, future strategies must transition from isolated project-based operations to a synchronized, holistic framework.

Furthermore, to establish an interactive, demand-driven service delivery system, Bangladesh must effectively operationalize and refine the institutional structures mapped out by the **National Rural Development Policy (NRDP)**. The policy's blueprint for high-powered, inter-ministerial steering bodies under the **Rural Development and Co-operatives Division (RDCD)** framework provides the necessary foundation to bridge sectoral gaps.

Finally, fortifying a coordinated administrative framework and institutionalizing data-driven review systems, the RDCD and its partner agencies can actively shield the rural economy from the shocks of climate change and globalization, enhance market integration, and cement Bangladesh's status as a global leader in sustainable rural transformation.

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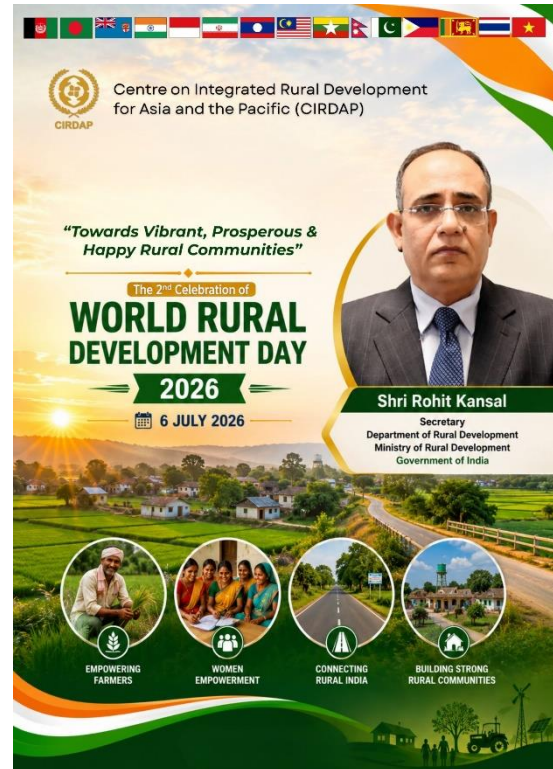
INDIA

Rural India Rising: Empowered Communities, Prosperous Villages, Viksit Bharat @ 2047

By Shri Rohit Kansal, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

World Rural Development Day, observed on 6 July each year, provides an important opportunity for the global community to reaffirm its commitment to inclusive, sustainable and people centric rural transformation. It is a day to recognize the vital contribution of rural communities to national development, food security, environmental sustainability and cultural heritage, while renewing efforts to address the challenges that continue to affect rural populations across the world.

It gives me immense pleasure to greet you all on the occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, a day dedicated to recognizing the transformative power of rural communities and reaffirming our commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. Rural India is the backbone of our nation. The progress of our villages is inseparable from the progress of India. Guided by the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) @ 2047, the Ministry of Rural Development has been working relentlessly to improve livelihoods, strengthen infrastructure, empower communities, and create opportunities for every rural household.



A major milestone in this journey has been the transition from Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to the Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB–G RAM G Act, 2025, which comes into effect from 1st July, 2026. Under the erstwhile MGNREGA, more than 49 billion person days of employment had been generated. The new VB–G RAM G Act establishes a statutory guarantee of 125 days (100 days under MGNREGA) of wage employment in every financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work. This enhanced guarantee is expected to provide renewed momentum to rural household incomes, livelihood security, village-level infrastructure creation, and sustainable rural development. Simultaneously, it seeks to create durable and productive rural infrastructure that strengthens water security, rural infrastructure, rural livelihoods, local economic growth, and resilience against climate-related challenges. Further, the Act establishes a modern, transparent and technology-enabled governance architecture to ensure effective implementation, accountability and high integrity service delivery.

The Ministry's efforts have also focused on improving the quality of life through Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana–Gramin. More than 30 million houses have been constructed under PMAY–G and rural households have received safe and dignified houses, which have transformed their lives and strengthened social security. These houses, supported by access to sanitation, electricity, clean cooking fuel, and drinking water, are helping create healthier and more prosperous rural communities.

Women's empowerment remains at the centre of our development strategy. Through Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission, more than 100 Million women have been organised into Self-Help Groups, enabling financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and community leadership. Today, these women are not only contributing to household incomes but are also emerging as agents of social and economic transformation. Connectivity has been another key priority. Through Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, rural roads have connected remote villages to markets, schools, healthcare facilities, and economic opportunities, reducing disparities and accelerating development.

Since the inception of the scheme, more than 800 thousand Kilometres of rural roads have been constructed across the country. Our commitment to sustainable development is also reflected in skill development of the rural youth being imparted through 786 training centres under the Deen Dayal Grameen Kaushalya Yojana and 636 Rural Self Employment Training Institutes spread across the country. Under these programmes, approx. 8 million rural youth have been successfully trained to promote sustainable livelihoods through skill development, wage employment and entrepreneurship.

These programmes are helping build resilient rural economies capable of meeting future challenges while creating opportunities for our rural youth. As we celebrate World Rural Development Day, we acknowledge the dedication of farmers, workers, women, youth, community institutions, Panchayati Raj (local self-government) representatives, and development partners who have contributed to this remarkable journey. Their participation and determination continue to drive rural transformation across the country.

Together, let us reaffirm our resolve to build stronger villages, create sustainable livelihoods, empower every citizen, and realize the vision of a prosperous, inclusive and developed India.

MALAYSIA

MALAYSIA'S Rural Transformation: Building Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities

*By Dato' Sri Suriani Ahmad, Secretary General
Ministry of Rural and Regional Development
(MRRD), Malaysia*

On the occasion of World Rural Development Day 2026, it is my pleasure to share Malaysia's continuing journey in advancing inclusive and sustainable rural development. This year's theme, *"Toward Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities"*, resonates strongly with our national aspiration to ensure that rural communities are not merely recipients of development, but active participants and drivers of progress.

Rural areas remain an integral part of Malaysia's development landscape. Home to approximately 8.1 million people, or nearly one-quarter of our population, rural communities continue to contribute significantly to the nation's economic, social and cultural fabric. Over the years, Malaysia's rural development agenda has evolved beyond addressing basic needs and poverty eradication. Today, our focus is on creating resilient rural ecosystems that generate economic opportunities, empower communities and enhance overall quality of life.



At the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD), our efforts are guided by the Rural Development Policy 2030 and supported by the MRRD Strategic Plan 2026–2030. These frameworks are aligned with the 13th Malaysia Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. Together, they provide a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening rural economies, developing human capital, improving infrastructure connectivity, expanding entrepreneurship and enhancing public service delivery.

Infrastructure development continues to be a key enabler of rural transformation. Access to quality roads, clean water, electricity, housing and digital connectivity remains essential in ensuring that rural communities can participate fully in modern economic activities. In recent years, Malaysia has continued to invest significantly in these areas, enabling greater mobility, improving access to services and creating new opportunities for economic growth across rural regions.

At the same time, we recognize that sustainable development is ultimately about people. Through programmes implemented by agencies under the Ministry and other strategic institutions, we continue to invest in education, skills development and entrepreneurship. Early childhood education programmes, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and community-based capacity-building initiatives are equipping rural citizens with the knowledge and competencies needed to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive environment.

The digital economy has also become an important catalyst for rural growth. Malaysian rural entrepreneurs are increasingly leveraging e-commerce platforms and digital technologies to access wider markets and create new sources of income. This transformation is helping rural businesses overcome geographical limitations while fostering greater innovation and competitiveness.

As for Visit Malaysia Year 2026, rural tourism presents another significant opportunity. Through initiatives such as Desa Kirana programme, we are showcasing the unique strengths of our villages, including their natural beauty, cultural heritage, local products and community-based tourism experiences. Beyond attracting visitors, these initiatives help generate sustainable income, create local employment & opportunities and preserve the identity of rural communities.

A distinguishing feature of Malaysia's rural development model is our emphasis on collaboration. Rural development is a shared responsibility that requires the collective efforts of government agencies, private sector partners, academia, civil society and local communities. Guided by a Whole-of-Nation approach, Malaysia continues to strengthen coordination mechanisms to ensure that development interventions are integrated, responsive and impactful.

We also believe strongly in evidence-based policymaking. Through strategic research initiatives and continuous engagement with stakeholders, we strive to ensure that our policies remain relevant to emerging challenges and opportunities. As rural communities face global trends such as digitalization, climate change, demographic shifts and economic transformation, adaptive and forward-looking policies will be increasingly important.

Malaysia's rural development journey is still evolving. While significant progress has been achieved, we remain committed to ensuring that no community is left behind. Our vision is clear: rural areas that are vibrant in their economic activities, prosperous in their opportunities and happy in the well-being of their people.

As we commemorate World Rural Development Day 2026, Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to working closely with regional and international partners, including CIRDAP, to share knowledge, exchange best practices and advance rural development for the benefit of future generations.

Together, we can build rural communities that are not only sustainable and resilient, but also places where people aspire to live, work and prosper.

IR IRAN

APERDRI: Advancing Rural Development Through Science: From Research to Rural Resilience

**By Dr. Mojtaba Palouj, Director General
Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural
Development Research Institute (APERDRI), IR
Iran**

Message from the Director General of the Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural Development Research Institute of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the International Day of Rural Development (2026); Theme: *"Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities"*

In the Name of God

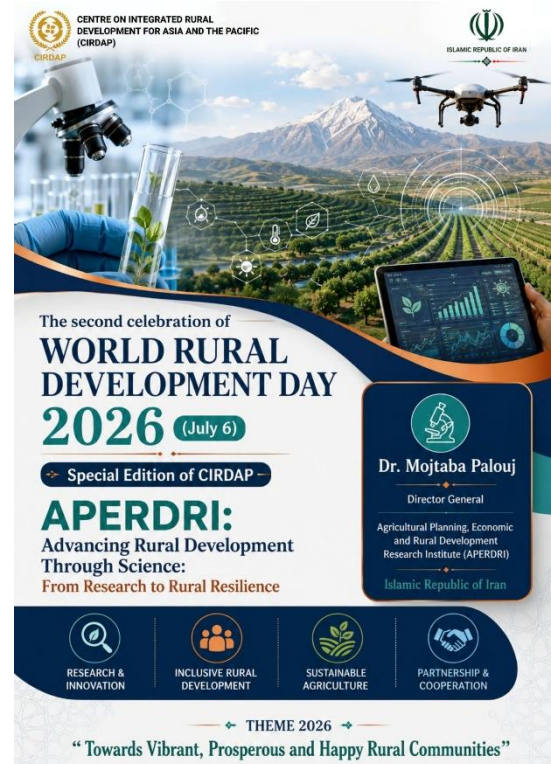
Despite the profound sorrow I feel over the recent difficult circumstances in my country, and mindful of my martyred Leader's enduring emphasis on rural development and agriculture, I would like to send my message on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Development and reaffirm our shared commitment to building vibrant, prosperous, and happy rural communities.

This year's theme reflects a shared vision that resonates strongly with the priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Building vibrant and prosperous rural communities requires more than economic growth; it calls for inclusive policies, evidence-based planning, innovation, social participation, environmental sustainability, and the empowerment of rural people, particularly women and youth.

Today, rural areas are confronted with unprecedented challenges arising from climate change, food insecurity, economic uncertainty, environmental degradation, and evolving social needs. These challenges reinforce the importance of knowledge-sharing, regional cooperation, and innovative approaches to rural transformation. Institutions such as CIRDAP play an indispensable role in facilitating dialogue, strengthening capacities, and promoting the exchange of successful experiences among Member States.

Drawing upon Iran's scientific capacities and extensive experience in rural development, the Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural Development Research Institute (APERDRI) has, in its capacity as the National Focal Point for CIRDAP, played a key role in strengthening Iran's participation and contribution to rural development policies and programmes across the Asia-Pacific region.

As the National Focal Point for CIRDAP, APERDRI is responsible for coordinating and facilitating Iran's engagement in the meetings and activities of CIRDAP's Technical Committee and Executive Committee. The Institute actively promotes constructive cooperation with the CIRDAP Secretariat and its Member States through knowledge exchange, the implementation of joint initiatives, technical collaboration, and capacity development in the field of rural development. In fulfilling this mandate, APERDRI's Department of Rural and Agricultural Development, whose mission closely aligns with the objectives of CIRDAP, works in close partnership with national institutions and organizations, particularly the Office for Rural and Nomadic Women Affairs of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad. This



collaboration has significantly strengthened opportunities for joint programmes and partnerships between APERDRI and CIRDAP. The Department's major areas of work include research and policy studies on geographical indications, rural tourism and handicrafts development, spatial planning, demographic change, the empowerment of rural women, rural and nomadic entrepreneurship, and international experiences and best practices in rural development.

On behalf of the Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural Development Research Institute of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to CIRDAP for its continued support and valuable cooperation in highlighting the achievements of Iran's exemplary and entrepreneurial rural women at the regional level. Showcasing these inspiring success stories has not only recognized the remarkable contributions of Iranian rural women but has also encouraged the exchange of experiences and best practices among Member States.

We also highly appreciate CIRDAP's collaboration in implementing the project on Rural Women's Empowerment in the Sericulture Value Chain. This research project has demonstrated how targeted capacity-building, skills development, entrepreneurship, and value-chain approaches can create sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural women while contributing to local economic development and social inclusion. These successful experiences reaffirm our belief that empowering rural women is not merely a social objective; it is a strategic investment in food security, poverty reduction, resilient rural economies, and sustainable development. Likewise, investing in rural youth, innovation, digital technologies, and knowledge-based agriculture will be essential for shaping the future of rural communities across our region.

As a research and policy institution, we remain committed to generating evidence-based knowledge, promoting policy innovation, supporting capacity development, and strengthening partnerships that contribute to sustainable rural development. We firmly believe that stronger collaboration among research institutions, governments, international organizations, and local communities is essential for addressing common challenges and achieving shared prosperity.

Looking ahead, we are confident that the longstanding partnership between our Institute and CIRDAP will continue to grow. We look forward to expanding our collaboration in research, policy dialogue, knowledge exchange, professional training, women's empowerment, youth development, sustainable agriculture, and rural innovation for the mutual benefit of all Member States.

In closing, I express my sincere appreciation to the CIRDAP Secretariat for its leadership and continued dedication to advancing integrated rural development across Asia and the Pacific. I wish CIRDAP continued success in its valuable mission and extend my best wishes to all Member States for peace, prosperity, and sustainable rural development.

With best wishes and God's blessings,

LAO PDR

The future of Lao PDR begins in its villages—where resilient communities build a resilient nation

By Dr. Boundeth Southavilay, Director General of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lao PDR

1. Introduction: A Moment of Historic Synthesis

On this landmark occasion of World Rural Development Day, July 6th, 2026, on behalf of the Executive Committee (EC) of the Lao PDR extends its warmest fraternal greetings and congratulations to the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) Secretariat, our esteemed fellow Member States, and our dedicated development partners across the region.

July 6th represents a powerful moment of synthesis for our collective mission. It marks both the globally recognized day honouring rural communities and the 47th anniversary of CIRDAP's founding in 1979. For nearly five decades, our intergovernmental alliance has consistently championed the philosophy that true national prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region begins within our agrarian roots.

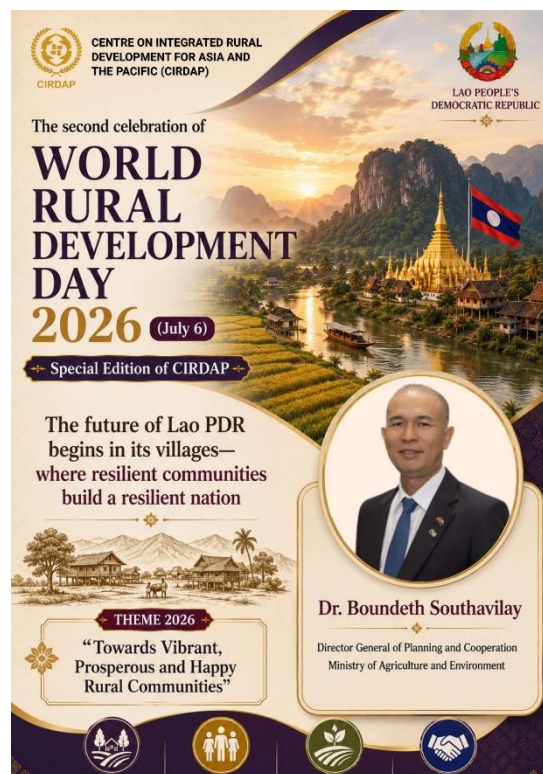
As a proud and active member of CIRDAP, Lao PDR is honoured to present its progress, systemic institutional shifts, and grassroots achievements within this widely disseminated Special Edition. Our national story is a testament to the fact that when strategic regional guidance is fused with bold domestic political will, the transformation of rural landscapes becomes an achievable reality.

2. Navigating the LDC Graduation and the 10th NSEDP

The year 2026 stands as an unprecedented historical juncture for the Lao People's Democratic Republic. As our nation stands on the threshold of graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, the Government of Lao PDR recognizes that sustainable economic transition cannot be achieved through urban advancement alone. The core of our national sovereignty, food security, and cultural heritage lies within our rural villages.

Guided by the transition from our 9th to our newly minted 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP 2026–2030), Lao PDR has placed inclusive, people-centered rural upliftment at the absolute apex of our public policy. Our foundational regulatory framework, Decree No. 348 on Poverty Graduation and Development, has systematically reshaped local governance. Rather than applying superficial, short-term poverty relief, our focus has pivoted toward building self-reliant structural resilience.

By employing rigorous, quantifiable indicators to define "poverty-free households" and "developed villages," we have successfully lifted thousands of families into sustainable livelihoods, bridging the socio-economic divide between remote mountainous ethnolinguistic communities and urban economic centres.



3. Institutional Reformation: The Integrated Approach

Lao PDR's rural development breakthroughs are our historic institutional reform. Acknowledging that rural livelihoods, ecological preservation, and food production are completely inseparable, the state successfully consolidated its administrative architecture by establishing the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (merging the former portfolios of Agriculture and Forestry with Natural Resources and Environment).

Historically, rural development initiatives across the developing world have suffered from administrative fragmentation. By eliminating these institutional silos, Lao PDR has pioneered a truly integrated approach. For the first time, our planning departments manage agricultural targets, forestry management, land-use zoning, water preservation, biodiversity protection, and climate change adaptation under one singular, holistic blueprint.

This administrative convergence allows us to implement nature-positive rural development models across our national focal zones, ensuring that infrastructure expansion never comes at the cost of our vital ecological capital.

4. Operationalizing Food Systems Transformation

At the heart of our rural achievements is the official launch and implementation of the **National Action Plan to Transform Food Systems (2025–2030)**. Developed in close alignment with the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub's Convergence Initiative, this strategic roadmap directly addresses the global "5F crisis"—Food, Feed, Fuel, Fertilizer, and Finance—which has disproportionately affected smallholder farmers.

Lao PDR has rejected unsustainable, chemical-intensive agricultural practices in favor of a **Green Sustainable Agriculture (GSA)** framework. Through community-led agricultural cooperatives, our rural farmers are shifting from subsistence operations into high-value, climate-resilient agribusinesses.

Through targeted public-private financing, we have successfully scaled up the regional competitiveness of premium, geographically unique Lao products. The organic coffee of the **Bolaven Plateau** and our traditional, highly nutritious **Khao Kai Noi** aromatic rice are no longer merely local staples; they have become high-value commodities in regional markets, driving foreign exchange and injecting tangible financial capital directly back into village economies.

5. Human Capital: Prioritizing Health, Nutrition, and Social Equity

The Lao PDR Executive Committee firmly believes that physical infrastructure is fragile without a corresponding investment in human capital. Consequently, our rural strategies are intricately balanced with aggressive social protection, maternal health, and infant nutrition interventions.

Through multi-agency convergence, Lao PDR has achieved record milestones in rural healthcare. We have dramatically scaled up national immunization coverages and school meal programs in disadvantaged districts, actively fighting childhood stunting and food insecurity. Furthermore, by expanding digital civil registration networks into remote provincial areas, we ensure that newborn children receive immediate legal recognition and access to essential state healthcare from day one.

Simultaneously, our rural strategies explicitly treat women as the primary engines of rural economic transformation. By legalizing and fostering village-level savings groups, providing vocational business training, and unlocking micro-loans, rural Lao women are transitioning from unpaid agrarian laborers into thriving micro-entrepreneurs, managing local supply chains and elevating household incomes.

6. Digital Connectivity and Community-Based Eco-Tourism

As we embrace the technological advancements of 2026, Lao PDR is actively dismantling the concept of rural isolation through digital extension frameworks. By introducing localized digital platforms, our

remote smallholders now receive real-time weather analytics, advanced pest-control strategies, and direct market commodity pricing on their mobile networks, eliminating exploitative intermediary practices.

Furthermore, we have harnessed our pristine natural landscapes to pioneer Community-Based Eco-Tourism (CBET). Through frameworks like the Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods Project, rural communities are legally empowered to manage local eco-tourism zones. From our northern heritage sanctuaries to our southern riverine networks, this low-impact hospitality model provides sustainable, non-extractive alternative livelihoods, proving to our rural populations that environmental conservation pays direct, life-changing dividends.

7. A Renewed Pledge for Regional Solidarity

While the achievements of Lao PDR are substantial, we recognize that the road ahead presents persistent challenges. Our rural communities remain intensely vulnerable to severe climate anomalies, including seasonal floods and prolonged droughts, which demand continuous infrastructural adaptation and substantial financial investments.

However, the resilience of the Lao people, backed by our structural and institutional reforms, demonstrates the absolute validity of CIRDAP's integrated rural development philosophy. No nation can conquer poverty in isolation; it requires shared frameworks, mutual accountability, and cross-border knowledge exchanges.

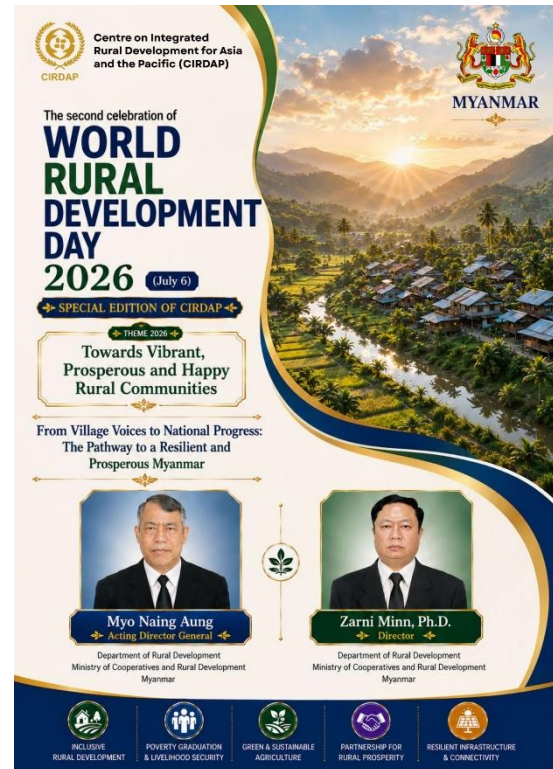
On this World Rural Development Day 2026, on behalf of the Executive Committee of Lao PDR re-affirms its unshakeable commitment to the CIRDAP charter. We stand fully prepared to share our institutional blueprints, our food systems roadmaps, and our community governance models with all fellow Member States. Let us move forward with collective determination, ensuring that our rural landscapes remain places of economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and profound human dignity.

MYANMAR

From Village Voices to National Progress: The Pathway to a Resilient and Prosperous Myanmar

By Myo Naing Aung, Acting (Director General), and Zarni Minn, Ph.D, (Director), Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, Myanmar

As the global community unites to commemorate World Rural Development Day 2026, the Dept. of Rural Development (DRD) extends its warmest greetings to our regional partners, frontline development administrators, and the resilient rural communities across the Asia-Pacific. It is our professional privilege to present this comprehensive technical overview detailing Myanmar's strategic actions toward inclusive, resilient, and integrated rural transformation. As an active and deeply engaged member state of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), Myanmar remains steadfast in aligning our national rural engineering and planning codes with regional technical criteria, recognizing that shared knowledge and harmonized implementation are essential to driving sustainable socio-economic development and structural poverty eradication.



This year, our collective regional focus marks a critical paradigm shift in how we approach rural development. We deeply recognize that sustainable rural transformation extends far beyond passive infrastructure delivery or basic macroeconomic growth indices. True development must culminate in a holistic elevation of human



dignity—fostering environments where communities are socially dynamic, economically self-reliant, and fully empowered to shape their own destinies. By equipping smallholder

farmers with collective bargaining power, advancing community-led resource management, and structurally integrating local institutions into regional value chains, we are laying the essential foundation for rural ecosystems to achieve long-term resilience and profound well-being.



region.

In alignment with these regional best practices, the Myanmar Rural Development Strategic Framework structures its field operations across five distinct, mutually reinforcing pillars. Executed as core mandates of the DRD, these pillars are designed to bridge the rural-urban development gap through people-centered interventions:

- ❖ Enhancing rural transport connectivity and expanding solar energy access.
- ❖ Ensuring access to safe and secure water supplies for all rural communities.
- ❖ Uplifting the standards and quality of rural education.
- ❖ Strengthening rural healthcare services and infrastructure to promote community well-being.
- ❖ Accelerating rural economic development.



To effectively translate these high-level frameworks into localized field actions, the DRD deploys rigorous institutional methodologies. Central to this operational architecture is the Village Development Planning (VDP) process, a participatory bottom-up model executed annually across thousands of villages nationwide. Using data-driven targeting matrices and localized indices, the VDP systematically identifies vulnerabilities and optimizes resource allocation, ensuring that developmental capital directly addresses the felt needs of our communities.



Building seamlessly upon these grassroots planning outcomes, DRD personnel engage directly with rural networks to build tangible community assets. These frontline operations encompass the construction of all-weather rural roads, the installation of multi-tiered community water purification systems, and the scaling of localized renewable energy through Solar Home Systems and community Mini-Grids. Furthermore, we actively drive agricultural productivity via solar-powered irrigation and unlock local economic potential through low-interest revolving livelihood loans, mechanical training, and digital literacy programs for village entrepreneurs.

To institutionalize these diverse, multi-sectoral interventions and pave the way for future regional frameworks, Myanmar has strategically scaled up the SMART Village Project. Managed directly by the DRD, this five-year initiative currently serves as an operational pilot across 128 villages spanning 104 townships in all states and regions. This ambitious framework integrates our foundational pillars into a unified, tech-enabled ecosystem encompassing six key sectors: Rural

Infrastructure Development, Inputs and Financial Services, Livelihood Enhancement, Institutional Capacity Building, Social Protection, and Environmental Conservation.

While localized initiatives like the SMART Village Project demonstrate the effectiveness of integrated development, we recognize that the macro-level technical challenges of rural poverty eradication and climate adaptation cannot be solved in isolation. Navigating multifaceted challenges such as geographic remoteness and severe climate shocks demands coordinated, transnational action. Moving away from scattered interventions, our real-world field applications reinforce the efficiency of area-focused integrated projects that target entire geographic clusters simultaneously, applying infrastructure and economic structures in a coordinated fashion to achieve lasting impacts.

Executing these area-focused, multi-sectoral projects naturally entails substantial investment requirements. To bridge our critical resource gaps, our forward-looking resource mobilization strategy focuses on fostering dynamic multi-stakeholder partnerships. By merging public resources, private sector innovation, and community equity, we aim to scale up climate-resilient rural markets. The continued, robust support of international development partners, donor agencies, and regional bodies remains absolutely vital to sustaining this collaborative architecture.



As we look out across the horizon of 2026 and beyond, the path forward demands steadfast administrative commitment, sound engineering practices, and transparent fiscal governance. We remain dedicated to continually updating our data-driven targeting matrices, strengthening field-level monitoring, and supporting our village cooperatives as modern business enterprises. This publication stands as both a record of technical progress and an operational roadmap for the collaborative years ahead.

World Rural Development Day is a poignant reminder that the true strength of a nation does not reside solely within its urban centers, but within the resilience, resourcefulness, and dignity of the millions who call our villages home. In honoring our frontline personnel and deepening our regional partnerships, we are resolutely committed to maintaining our strategic focus and expanding our field operations. By actively aligning our future engineering frameworks and administrative initiatives with this year's profoundly important theme, **"Towards Vibrant, Prosperous and Happy Rural Communities,"** we will ensure that every effort we undertake translates this regional vision into tangible, everyday realities for all rural citizens.

BANGLADESH

BARD and Rural Development in Bangladesh: From Field Innovations to Sustainable Rural Transformation

By Mr. Saif Uddin Ahmed, Director General, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) Comilla, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is predominantly a rural and agrarian country, where rural development has historically remained at the centre of national development efforts. Since independence, rural transformation has been regarded not merely as an agricultural concern but as a comprehensive process involving economic advancement, social inclusion, institutional strengthening, human development, environmental sustainability, and participatory governance. Over time, the concept of rural development in Bangladesh has evolved from a production-centered approach to a broader and more integrated framework that prioritizes livelihoods, local institutions, resilience, and community empowerment.

Within this transformation journey, the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) has played a pioneering and enduring role. Established on 27 May 1959, BARD has emerged as one of the country's most influential institutions in generating and promoting innovative approaches to rural development. Since its inception, the Academy has continuously engaged in action research alongside its two other statutory mandates—training and research—as stipulated in the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development Act, 2017.

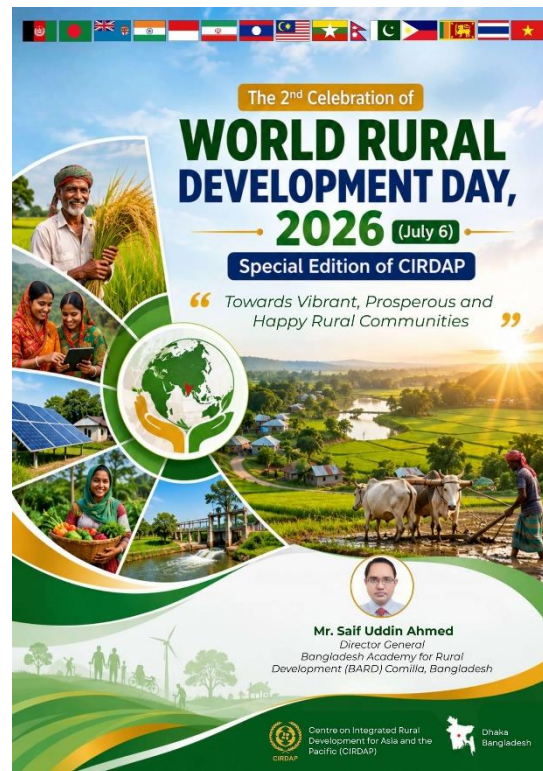
Through decades of field experimentation, policy engagement, institutional innovation, and capacity development, BARD has significantly contributed to shaping Bangladesh's rural development discourse and practice.

2. Role of BARD in Rural Development: A Chronological Perspective

One of the most remarkable contributions to rural development in Bangladesh emerged through the institutional innovations introduced by BARD during the 1960s. The internationally acclaimed Comilla Model, developed under the leadership of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, became one of the most influential rural development approaches in the Global South and continues to inspire development initiatives worldwide (Khan, 1996; World Bank, 1975).

The Comilla Model emphasized people's participation, cooperative organization, training, local governance, and institutional coordination. Four interrelated components formed the foundation of this model:

- Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC)
- Rural Works Programme (RWP)
- Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP)



- Two-tier Cooperative System

These initiatives aimed to strengthen local institutions, enhance agricultural productivity, improve infrastructure, and ensure active participation of rural communities in development processes. Over time, the principles and operational mechanisms introduced through these initiatives became institutionalized within various government programmes and administrative structures. For instance, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was established in 1972 following the success of Comilla Model. The IRDP was the outcome of two-tier cooperative system, one of the major components of Comilla Model. Later in 1982, IRDP was transformed into the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB).

Building upon the lessons of the Comilla Model, BARD introduced the Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP) in 1975, which further strengthened rural development interventions in Bangladesh. Unlike earlier development approaches that primarily focused on agricultural production, CVDP adopted a holistic and integrated village-based strategy combining livelihood generation, education, health services, institutional development, leadership cultivation, and social mobilization.

By mobilizing rural communities through cooperative societies and community-based organizations, the CVDP enhanced access to essential public services, expanded economic opportunities, and fostered stronger and more participatory local governance systems. The programme promoted self-reliance, participatory decision-making, social inclusion, and local leadership development, thereby contributing significantly to poverty reduction and rural social transformation.

Action Research of BARD

In response to changing development priorities and emerging rural challenges, BARD continues to undertake a broad spectrum of action research initiatives addressing contemporary socio-economic issues. Current action research include:

- Rural livelihood improvement through Village-Based Organizations (VBOs) and Union Parishads
- Market expansion and capacity development of the traditional Khadi industry
- SDG localization through enhanced citizen participation
- E-Parishad initiatives for improved rural service delivery
- Vocational skills development and employment generation for Qawmi Madrasa students
- Community-based support mechanisms for elderly and differently abled populations
- Floodplain aquaculture and safe food production through community enterprises
- Climate adaptation and livelihood improvement in char areas
- Rural tourism and community-based livelihood diversification

These initiatives reflect BARD's continued commitment to generating evidence-based, scalable, and sustainable rural development models responsive to contemporary realities. At present, BARD is also implementing an Annual Development Programme (ADP) project entitled "Ecological Farming through Village-Based Organizations", which seeks to promote environmentally sustainable agricultural practices and improve rural livelihoods.

Human Resource Development initiatives of BARD

Beyond action research, BARD has played a major role in human resource development through extensive training programmes targeting government and non-government officials, project beneficiaries, local government representatives, members of cooperative societies, university faculty members, and students. As of April 2026, BARD conducted 9,489 training courses with participation

from approximately 330,922 individuals, including 200,211 male and 130,711 female participants. BARD has signed a number of MoU with different universities such as Bangladesh University of Professionals, Bangladesh, Yeungnam University, South Korea, Cumilla University, Bangladesh, Royal University of Bhutan etc.

Research Programmes of BARD

Research remains another central pillar of BARD's mandate. On average, the Academy conducts 10–12 research studies annually, aligned with national development priorities and policy directions. Through generating field-based evidence and practical knowledge, BARD's research contributes to policy formulation, enriches training programmes, and facilitates the development of innovative rural interventions.

3. Present Focus of BARD: A Way Forward

Rural Bangladesh is currently undergoing rapid transformation driven by economic development, demographic shifts, technological advancement, climate variability, changing occupational structures, urbanization, and market integration. These evolving realities demand new and adaptive approaches to rural development. BARD continues to respond through experimental programmes and field-based action research addressing multifaceted rural challenges. Experience demonstrates that meaningful participation of local communities remains a fundamental condition for successful and sustainable rural development. Future rural development approaches must place greater emphasis on community ownership, institutional sustainability, climate resilience, digital inclusion, entrepreneurship development, and localized innovation.

Drawing upon its long history of field experimentation and institutional learning, BARD maintains that rural development cannot be achieved through fragmented interventions alone. Sustainable transformation requires an integrated process built upon active citizen engagement, institutional capacity, and evidence-based policymaking.

BARD serves as the national link institution of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), fostering regional cooperation through collaborative research, training, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.



Group photo of international training programme on 'Leadership Development Training Programme for Strengthening Rural Cooperatives' organized collaboratively by BARD and CIRDAP

In addition, every year, BARD, in collaboration with the African Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), jointly organizes an international training workshop titled “ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND RURAL TRANSFORMATION.” BARD has also been implementing the SAEMAUL PLUS END POVERTY PROGRAM (SPEPP) in partnership with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), drawing upon global best practices to promote sustainable rural development. Moreover, BARD organizes international research conference with the collaboration of INSEARCH every year. These strategic international partnerships have significantly strengthened BARD’s institutional capacity and are expected to pave the way for more innovative, inclusive, and impactful development interventions in the years ahead.



Certificate Award Ceremony of AARDO international Training Programme

The Academy’s present initiatives strongly align with the Government of Bangladesh’s national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If appropriately nurtured and scaled, these initiatives hold the potential to evolve into future models of rural transformation.

As demonstrated through the legacy of the Comilla Model, BARD remains uniquely positioned to generate new pathways toward inclusive, resilient, and sustainable rural development in Bangladesh and beyond.

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INDONESIA

Toward a Prosperous Village: Indonesia's Neighbourhood Cooperatives' Movement

By La Ode Ahmad P Bolombo, Director General Village Administration, Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Indonesia

Toward a Prosperous Village:

Through the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative

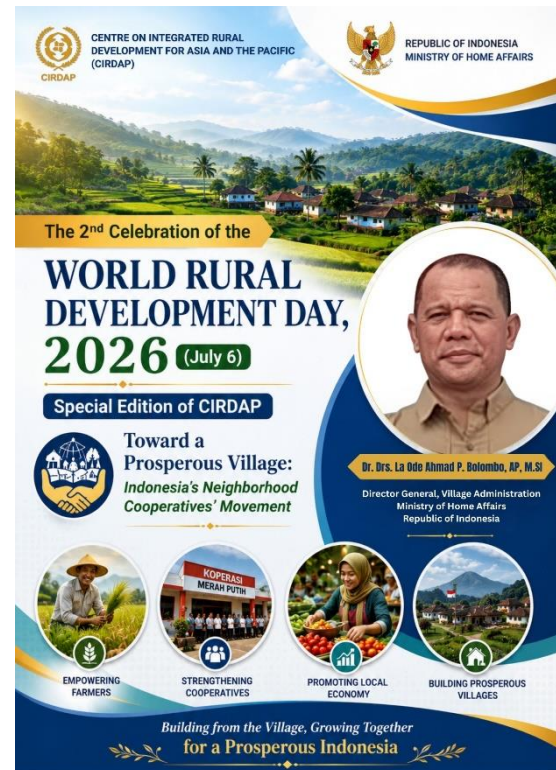
The Merah Putih Village Cooperative was founded with high hopes of bringing about economic improvement through mutual cooperation in villages and neighbourhoods.

The Cooperative is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran's "Asta Cita" (Eight Aspirations), particularly the Sixth Aspiration: building from the villages and from the grassroots level to achieve economic equality and eradicate poverty. The Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative



was established through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2025 on Accelerating the Formation of Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperatives and Presidential Decree No. 9 of 2025 on the Formation of a Task Force for Accelerating the Formation of Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperatives, with a target of 80,000 cooperatives across Indonesia.

Fundamentally, cooperatives play a strategic role in strengthening the foundation of the people's economy, particularly in Village/Neighbourhood that possess potential but still face challenges regarding welfare. In accordance with the mandate of Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia's economy is organized on the principle of kinship, and cooperatives serve as a tangible manifestation of that spirit. The Merah Putih Cooperative (KMP) serves as a cooperative model that prioritizes the values of nationalism and mutual cooperation, driven by the commitment of the President of the Republic of Indonesia to strengthen the people's economy through the establishment of cooperatives Village/Neighbourhood. This initiative aims to promote food security and improve the well-being of Village/Neighbourhood communities in a



sustainable manner, ensuring that growth is not concentrated solely in urban areas.

The abundance of natural resources in nearly all villages and neighbourhoods in Indonesia represents significant potential for development. In recent years, the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors have emerged as the primary drivers of the local economy and the main sources of livelihood for rural communities. These sectors not only hold high economic value but also reflect the economic patterns of rural communities, which remain rooted in solidarity, local wisdom, and the spirit of mutual cooperation. This is where the role of cooperatives is needed as a vehicle to consolidate the economic strength of rural communities. Through cooperatives, abundant natural resources can be managed collectively through a more structured system, thereby increasing community production capacity. Cooperatives can also serve as a bridge to access greater capital, expand markets, and develop community skills through business training.



The Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative is currently entering a more substantive operational phase; it is no longer merely performing conventional functions—such as conducting



economic activities based on general principles (interest/fees) to improve members' welfare—but is now evolving into a strategic link that bridges the gap between small producers and a broad consumer base. The primary focus of this policy is to provide a prominent platform for the creative industry and local food processing sector so they can compete without being hindered by an unbalanced distribution system or market monopolies.

This cooperative is designed to revitalize the independent production of daily necessities in every region by strengthening the people's economy, empowering rural communities, and accelerating food and energy self-sufficiency to realize the Golden Indonesia vision. One of the approaches taken is to enter the production and post-production sectors. The Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative is able to add value to the village's flagship commodities, and this approach has proven effective in absorbing local labour, maintaining economic stability for residents, and simultaneously strengthening the foundation of the national economy—which has long been supported by the dynamism of the SME sector as the backbone of the nation.

This cooperative transformation has also brought a spirit of digitalization and modernization to inventory management and product marketing. Through integrated business collaboration, every cooperative member has equal opportunities to access capital and professional management training. With a transparent and accountable system, the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative builds the trust of village and neighbourhood communities that the people's economy can adapt to global dynamics without abandoning the principles of kinship and mutual cooperation that define the identity of the Indonesian nation.



Optimism regarding the success of the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative program continues to grow as Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative outlets become more widespread across various regions of Indonesia. The government is committed to continuing to oversee this policy so that economic growth is not only concentrated in urban areas but also reaches the far corners of the country, including villages. Through strong economic self-reliance at the village and neighbourhood levels, the Red and White Cooperative is optimistic that it can elevate Indonesia's

MSMEs, create a more prosperous society, and realize sustainable collective economic sovereignty.

In essence, the establishment of the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative is a strategic step toward promoting the economic self-reliance of the village community; therefore, to ensure the program's sustained success, regular and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation by stakeholders are necessary so that the program does not remain merely a formality but truly delivers tangible benefits to the community. For it is only through shared commitment and consistent implementation that the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative can become a solid foundation for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable village economic development.

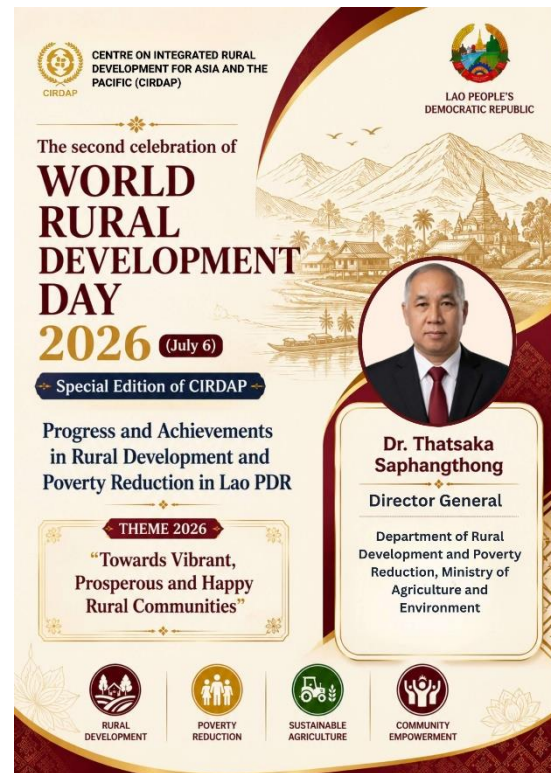
Overall, the Merah Putih Village/Neighbourhood Cooperative program is not merely a program but a national movement to build economic self-reliance from the village level. With support from all sectors, including ministries and agencies, and implemented digitally with active community participation, the Red and White Cooperative has the potential to become a key pillar in realizing an inclusive, self-reliant, and globally competitive Indonesia by 2045.

LAO PDR

Progress and Achievements in Rural Development and Poverty Reduction in Lao PDR

By Dr. Thatsaka Saphangthong, Director General of Department of Rural Development and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lao PDR

The Department of Rural Development and Poverty Reduction (DRDPR) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) of Lao PDR remains at the forefront of the nation's efforts to achieve sustainable development and inclusive growth. As we celebrate World Rural Development Day (WRDD) 2026, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the significant strides made in transforming rural landscapes and improving the lives of millions. Guided by the 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPlan) and international commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Lao PDR has implemented innovative strategies and projects that are reshaping the rural sector. As we know that Lao PDR is a landlocked with a population of 7.8 million. As of 2024/2025, about 15 percent of its people live below the national poverty line.



The core mission of the DRDPR is to bridge the urban-rural divide by fostering economic opportunities, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable populations. The Lao Government's approach to rural development has evolved from simple infrastructure provision to a multi-dimensional strategy that integrates climate resilience, digital inclusion, and market-linked agriculture.

In 2026, the focus has intensified on moving beyond "graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status" toward ensuring that the transition is sustainable and leaves no one behind. This involves a deep-rooted commitment to the **"Three Builds" (Sam Sang) directive**, decentralizing power and resources to the provincial, district, and village levels to empower local communities.

Highlight of Rural Development Projects

1. Infrastructure for Connectivity and Market Access

One of the most visible achievements has been the expansion of rural infrastructure. Recognizing that isolation is a primary driver of poverty, the DRDPR has prioritized the construction of all-weather roads, bridges, and irrigation systems.

- **The Rural Access Improvement Project:** By 2026, over 25,000 Km length of road in the rural area in Lao PDR are now connected by roads that remain passable during the monsoon season. This has drastically reduced the cost of transporting agricultural produce to urban markets and improved access to essential health and education services.

- **Irrigation Modernization:** In collaboration with international partners, the Ministry has upgraded traditional irrigation systems into smart, solar-powered networks. These systems have increased cropping intensity, allowing farmers in provinces like Savannakhet and Champasak to cultivate high-value crops during the dry season.

2. Strengthening the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)

Ministry of Agriculture and Environment launched a Community Livelihood Enhancement and Resilience project to improve rural livelihoods and enhance the resilience of villages that are most vulnerable to poverty, climate change, and malnutrition.

Funded by the World Bank and implemented by the government's Poverty Reduction Fund, the project, known as CLEAR, will work with around 450 rural villages and help about 216,000 people improve their income generating activities and family nutrition.

"The Poverty Reduction Fund has been leading the Lao PDR's actions on the ground against poverty for over 20 years and is evolving into an agency managing several projects. The CLEAR initiative uses strategic plans in line with government policy and adapted to the changing rural sector and welcomes collaboration and partnerships on this new project."

The Poverty Reduction Fund has implemented three World Bank-financed projects since 2003, and CLEAR builds on this long engagement.

"The Poverty Reduction Fund has a track record of gradual innovation, improving infrastructure for well over 1 million rural people through more than 6,000 small-scale works. By 2020, nearly 10,000 households had invested in new livelihood options through its most recent project," said Alex Kremer, World Bank Country Manager for the Lao PDR. "CLEAR will continue its well-established implementation mechanisms, investing in small-scale infrastructure such as access roads and drinking water in remote villages, and emphasizing disaster and climate resilient building standards."

CLEAR will focus on climate resilience and diversification to improve livelihood sources and diets. The project incorporates lessons learned from Poverty Reduction Fund projects, and from World Bank-financed community livelihood and climate resilience initiatives in the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Kenya.

The CLEAR project is part of the government's World Bank-supported nutrition convergence programme, which works with development partners to improve nutrition and food security through livelihood support, social assistance, improved access to health services, clean water, and sanitation. The project targets poor and remote districts and villages across the country, continuing the work of the Poverty Reduction Fund in the four northern provinces of Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Huaphan, and Xieng Khuang, while extending activities to three provinces in the south — Saravan, Savannakhet, and Sekong

3. KOICA Project on Rural Development

KOICA has provided a total of US\$9 million to improve the livelihoods of people in Champassak, Xekong and Saravan provinces by increasing their incomes and improving their living condition on Integrated Rural Development Project in Three Provinces of Southern Lao PDR: The intervention utilized a holistic approach, blending community capacity building and technology: Southern Agricultural Training Centre (SATC): Located in Lak 35 (Itou village, Pakxong District), this facility was constructed to function as a regional hub to teach farmers modern cultivation, processing, and marketing technologies suitable for the southern climate; Economic Impact: The integration of improved agricultural seeds, rain-shield greenhouses, and better water management increased farming productivity by 42%. This helped boost average farm household incomes in pilot areas drastically; Sustainable Agriculture: The initiative provided specialized support, such as vegetable seed donations

and capacity building tailored to the region; Community Empowerment: To sustain the economic benefits long after the project's conclusion, it actively trained 3,500 rural women and youth leaders.

Establishment of Action Plan for Rural Development and Income Generation in Northern and Central Region in Laos," was a major US\$12.5 million initiative running from 2021 to 2025. The flagship program was implemented by the Department of Rural Development under the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in partnership with the Korea Development Strategy Institute and KOICA. Key specifics of the initiative include Target Areas: The project focused on community-led development across 14 villages in Vientiane Province, Borikhamxay, and Xieng Khuang. Key Achievements: The project completed 123 community-level projects, including upgrades to water supplies, educational and health infrastructure, and farming initiatives; Agricultural Capacity: The Lao-Korea Agricultural Techniques and Rural Development Service Centre in Vientiane was upgraded to a modern national training hub; Outcome: The intervention successfully concluded in September 2025, resulting in increased incomes, upgraded village infrastructure, and

Addressing Challenges and Looking Forwards

Despite these monumental achievements, the road ahead requires continued vigilance. The global economic fluctuations and the escalating impacts of climate change pose ongoing risks to rural stability. The DRDPR is currently aiming the 2030 Rural Transformation Roadmap, which emphasizes:

- Transitioning rural labours from subsistence smart farming to agri-business and technical services.
- Private Sector Engagement: Encouraging "Public-Private-Community Partnerships" to bring investment into rural value chains.
- Cross-Border Collaboration: Strengthening ties with ASEAN neighbours and CIRDAP member countries to share best practices in poverty alleviation.
- Sustainable development must ensure the efficient and balanced use of natural resources while avoiding depletion, adding that economic progress should also focus on human resources and improvement of people's welfare.

As we celebrate World Rural Development Day 2026, Lao PDR stands as a testament to the power of resilient planning and community-led action. The achievements of the Department of Rural Development and Poverty Reduction under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment reflect a nation that honours its rural roots while embracing a modern, sustainable future. Through the continued support of international partners and the unwavering spirit of the Lao people, the goal of a poverty-free, prosperous rural society is no longer a distant dream, but a rapidly approaching reality.

Lao PDR is ready to stand with CIRDAP and the international community on this World Rural Development Day. We celebrate not just our progress, but the resilience of the millions of Lao people who are the heart of our nation's development.

MALAYSIA

MALAYSIA'S Rural Agenda: Strategic Initiatives, Milestones and Future Trajectory

By Strategic Planning Division, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Malaysia

Introduction

Rural development has long been an integral part of Malaysia's national development agenda. While the country has experienced rapid urbanization and economic transformation over the past several decades, rural communities continue to play a vital role in sustaining economic growth, preserving cultural heritage, ensuring food security and strengthening social cohesion.

Today, approximately 8.1 million Malaysians, representing nearly one-quarter of the national population, live in rural areas. Ensuring that these communities continue to benefit from national progress remains a key priority of the Government of Malaysia. Like many developing nations, Malaysia's rural development journey began with a strong focus on poverty eradication and the provision of basic infrastructure.

Over time, however, the scope of development has expanded significantly. The focus has evolved from addressing fundamental needs to building vibrant rural economies, empowering communities, enhancing human capital, promoting entrepreneurship and embracing digital transformation.

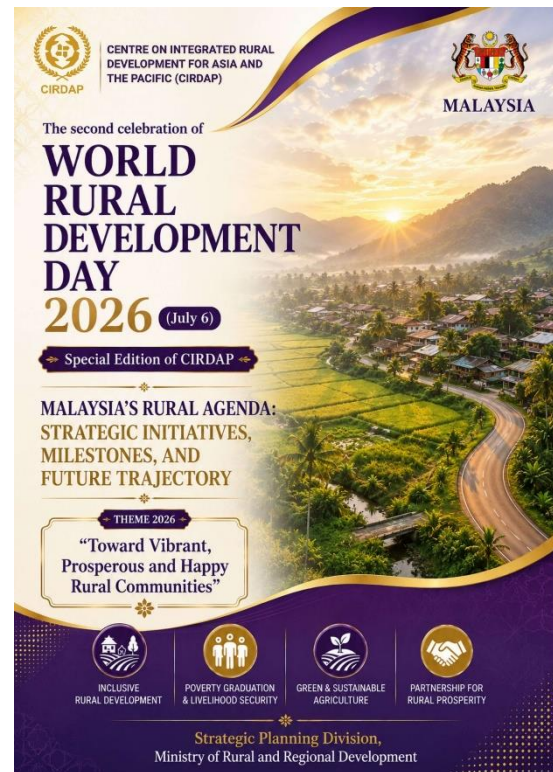
As the lead agency for rural development, the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD) adopts a holistic and people-centered approach to ensure that rural communities are not left behind. Guided by the Rural Development Policy 2030 and the MRRD Strategic Plan 2026–2030, Malaysia continues to pursue a vision of rural communities that are vibrant, prosperous and happy.

Setting the Direction for Rural Transformation

Malaysia's rural development agenda is anchored on the belief that sustainable development requires more than physical infrastructure. It requires investment in people, institutions, innovation and local leadership.

The Rural Development Policy 2030 serves as the nation's long-term framework for building inclusive, sustainable and resilient rural communities. The policy is guided by three key principles: sustainability, inclusivity and holistic development. These principles ensure that economic growth is balanced and development addresses the social, economic and human dimensions of rural life.

Complementing this vision is the MRRD Strategic Plan 2026–2030, which translates policy aspirations into actionable programs. The plan focuses on five key areas: strengthening rural economies, enhancing human capital, improving infrastructure connectivity, empowering entrepreneurs and strengthening public service delivery. Together, these frameworks provide a clear roadmap for rural transformation while supporting national priorities, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional aspirations under the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.



Connecting Communities and Creating Opportunities

Infrastructure remains one of the most important enablers of rural development. Access to roads, clean water, housing and essential services not only improves quality of life but also creates opportunities for economic participation and social mobility. Malaysia has invested consistently in rural infrastructure to improve connectivity between rural communities and economic centers. New roads and upgraded transport networks have reduced travel time, improved access to markets and facilitated the delivery of public services. These investments are particularly important for communities located in remote and geographically challenging areas.

Access to clean water remains another critical priority. Continuous investments in rural water supply systems have improved living conditions and public health outcomes for thousands of households. Similarly, housing assistance programs have provided safe and comfortable homes for low-income families, contributing to greater social stability and improved well-being.

Beyond physical infrastructure, these initiatives help create an environment where individuals and communities can pursue economic opportunities with greater confidence and security.

Investing in People from an Early Age

Malaysia recognizes that sustainable rural development begins with investing in people. Human capital development therefore remains at the heart of the country's rural transformation efforts.

One of the most successful initiatives under MRRD is the preschool program under the Department of Community Development (KEMAS), which has become a cornerstone of early childhood education in rural Malaysia. Through an extensive network of nearly 19,000 preschool classes nationwide, more than 210,000 children aged four to six receive access to quality early education each year.

The program has helped bridge educational disparities between rural and urban communities by ensuring that children in remote areas have access to learning opportunities during their formative years. Beyond academic preparation, KEMAS focuses on character building, social development and foundational skills that prepare children for lifelong learning.

Malaysia is also expanding support for children with special educational needs. The establishment of specialized autism-friendly early intervention centers in rural areas reflects the country's commitment to ensuring that development remains inclusive and accessible to all members of society.

Equipping Rural Youth for Future Jobs

As industries become increasingly technology-driven, preparing rural youth for future employment opportunities has become more important than ever. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has emerged as one of Malaysia's most effective tools for social mobility and workforce development. MRRD manages one of the country's largest TVET ecosystems, comprising 281 TVET institutions offering more than 569 programs across 15 skills clusters.

These institutions provide youth with practical skills and industry-relevant competencies that enhance employability and create pathways towards higher incomes. Programs are continuously updated to reflect emerging industry needs, including areas such as automation, digital technologies, advanced manufacturing and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Today, MRRD's TVET institutions maintain an employability rate exceeding 96 percent, demonstrating the effectiveness of skills-based education in helping rural youth secure meaningful employment and improve their socio-economic prospects.

Empowering Rural Entrepreneurs Through Digital Transformation

Entrepreneurship plays an increasingly important role in generating income and creating jobs within rural communities. Traditionally, many rural businesses operated within limited geographical markets. Particular attention is also given to women entrepreneurs, who continue to play an increasingly important role in driving household incomes and community-based economic activities across rural Malaysia.

However, advances in digital technology have created new opportunities for entrepreneurs to reach customers far beyond their local communities. Through various entrepreneurship development programs, MRRD supports more than 55,000 rural entrepreneurs across multiple sectors, including food processing, handicrafts, agriculture and community-based services. Strategic partnerships with e-commerce platforms and digital service providers have enabled entrepreneurs to adopt online business models, improve productivity and expand market access.

Digitalization has proven particularly valuable in helping rural entrepreneurs overcome geographical barriers. Today, products originating from villages and small towns can be marketed and sold to customers across Malaysia and beyond, creating new sources of income and increasing business resilience.

The experience demonstrates how digital inclusion can serve as a powerful catalyst for rural economic growth when supported by appropriate training, infrastructure and market access.

Unlocking Rural Potential Through Community-Based Tourism

Tourism has become an increasingly important component of Malaysia's rural development strategy. As preparations intensify for Visit Malaysia Year 2026, rural communities are being positioned as unique tourism destinations that offer authentic cultural experiences, natural attractions and local hospitality.

One notable initiative is Desa Kirana, a rural tourism program that showcases 25 selected rural destinations across Malaysia. The program highlights the unique strengths of rural communities, including traditional lifestyles, cultural heritage, agro-tourism experiences, eco-tourism attractions and locally produced products. More importantly, this program is driven by local community participation. Residents play an active role in developing tourism products, managing visitor experiences and generating economic benefits for their communities.

This approach ensures that tourism development remains sustainable while preserving local identity, cultural traditions and environmental assets. It also creates alternative income streams that reduce dependence on traditional economic activities and strengthen community resilience.

Strengthening Governance Through Collaboration

One of the key lessons from Malaysia's rural development experience is that meaningful transformation cannot be achieved by a single ministry or agency working in isolation.

Recognizing the interconnected nature of rural challenges, Malaysia has adopted a Whole-of-Nation approach that promotes collaboration across government agencies, the private sector, academia, civil society organizations and local communities.

A significant milestone in this effort was the establishment of the High-Level Committee on Rural Development, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister who is also the Minister of Rural and Regional Development Malaysia. The committee brings together thirteen ministries to coordinate policies and interventions affecting rural development and communities.

This integrated governance model has strengthened policy coherence, improved resource utilization and accelerated the implementation of development initiatives. More importantly, it reflects a shared

understanding that rural development is a collective responsibility requiring coordinated action at all levels.

Building Better Policies Through Research and Evidence

Effective policymaking depends on reliable data, continuous learning and evidence-based decision-making. To strengthen policy formulation and program effectiveness, MRRD established ThinkTank@MRRD as a strategic platform for research, knowledge generation and policy innovation. The initiative supports studies on a wide range of topics, including infrastructure development, education, entrepreneurship, TVET, women's empowerment and community development. Findings from these studies help policymakers assess program outcomes, identify emerging challenges and design more effective interventions. This commitment to research and evidence-based policymaking enables Malaysia to remain responsive to changing socio-economic conditions while ensuring that rural development investments continue to generate meaningful impact.

Looking Ahead

One important lesson from Malaysia's rural development journey is that sustainable transformation requires a balance between physical infrastructure, human capital development and community empowerment. Investments in roads and utilities remain important, but long-term success depends equally on strengthening local capabilities, fostering entrepreneurship and ensuring active participation by rural communities themselves.

Malaysia's rural transformation journey continues to evolve alongside changing global realities. Emerging challenges such as climate change, digital disruption, demographic shifts and economic uncertainty require innovative and adaptive responses. While significant progress has been achieved, the work of building resilient and future-ready rural communities remains ongoing. Malaysia remains committed to ensuring that rural development goes beyond infrastructure provision to encompass economic empowerment, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and community well-being. As countries across Asia and the Pacific seek effective approaches to rural transformation, Malaysia's experience highlights the importance of long-term planning, strong institutions, community participation and collaborative governance. Ultimately, the goal is not merely to develop rural areas, but to create communities where people can live with dignity, pursue opportunities and enjoy a high quality of life.

Malaysia remains committed to working closely with regional and international partners, including CIRDAP, to exchange knowledge, share best practices and explore innovative solutions that will advance rural development across Asia and the Pacific. Through collaboration and collective learning, we can build rural communities that are not only economically vibrant and resilient, but also inclusive, sustainable and future-ready.

May our vision continue to guide our efforts towards building vibrant, prosperous and happy rural communities for present and future generations.

PAKISTAN

Transforming Rural Lives: The Enduring Legacy of Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development (AHKNCRD)

By Mr. Israr Mohammad Khan, Director General, AHKNCRD, Establishment Division, Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan

1. Introduction and Institutional Framework

The rural landscape of Pakistan hosts over 60 percent of the nation's population, making rural development an indispensable pillar of national socio-economic progression. The Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development (AHKNCRD) was established to address the distinct spatial challenges and serves as a premier federal institution dedicated to capacity building, policy research, and institutional alignment in the field of rural uplift and poverty alleviation.

1.1 Constitutional and Institutional Alignment

AHKNCRD operating as an Attached Department under the Establishment Division of the Government of Pakistan, occupies a pivotal role in the federal administrative matrix. It serves as the apex national training body tasked with enhancing the capacity building of human capital of federal, provincial, and regional institutions involved in rural transformation.

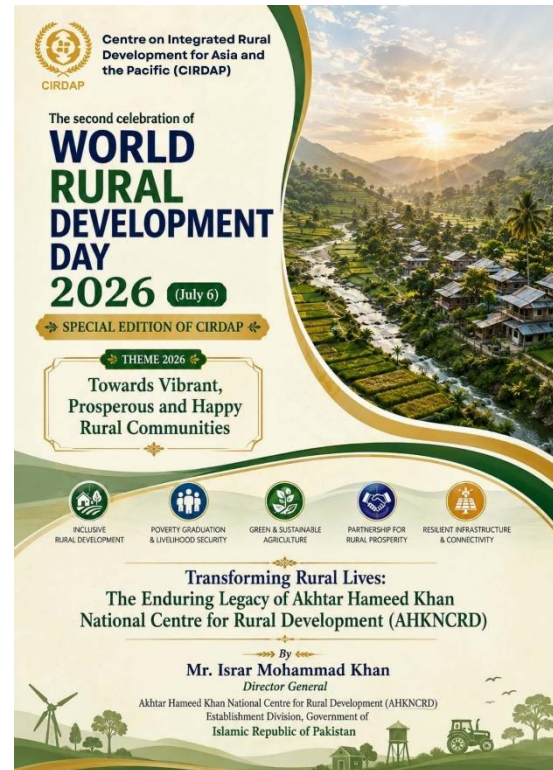
The institution bridges the gap between state-level policy formulation and grassroots execution. AHKNCRD organizes capacity building programmes for government functionaries, elected local representatives, academia and civil society actors to ensure the execution of public policy alignment with modern public administration frameworks.

1.2 Historical Evolution and Nomenclature

The institution was established in **1979** as the National Centre for Rural Development and Municipal Administration (NCRDMA) to provide institutional backing to the local government systems and integrated rural development programs implemented across the country.

In the year **2000**, the Government of Pakistan renamed the Centre as *Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development (AHKNCRD)*. This change was enacted to honour the legacy of Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, a world-renowned social scientist and pioneer of participatory rural development in South Asia. Dr. Khan's structural models—most notably the **Comilla Model (1959)** and the **Orangi Pilot Project, Karachi**—transformed global paradigms of community-driven infrastructure, microfinance, and cooperative systems. The rebranding marked a renewed institutional commitment to participatory, grassroots, and self-reliant rural development methodologies.

1.3 Physical and Infrastructural Ecosystem



AHKNCRD have a 12-acres campus in Islamabad and maintains a fully integrated educational and residential infrastructure. The institute includes an executive administrative block, modern lecture halls, and a specialized research library that houses an extensive collection of literature on rural sociology, agricultural economics, and governance. The Centre trains about two thousand people each year from Federal Capital, all four provinces (Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) & constituent units (Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and Gilgit-Baltistan, through its on-campus training activities and residential hostels, that also offer subsidized boarding and lodging. In addition, AHKNCRD also operates demonstration nurseries and agricultural experimental plots that facilitate practical training in local farming practices and environmentally sustainable land management.

2.0 Capacity Building and Human Resource Development

The primary function of the Centre is to design and execute specific training courses, workshops, and seminars aimed at enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of mid-level and senior public sector officials. These interventions primarily target functionaries from Nation Building Departments (NBDs), including Local Government and Rural Development Departments; Agriculture and Livestock wings; Public Health Engineering, Irrigation, and Forestry sectors; as well as the Social Welfare and Women Development Department. The Centre also extends its capacity-building initiatives to representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), fostering collaborative approaches to sustainable development and public service delivery. The training programs aim to equip Government officers with administrative, technical, and management skills, bridging the divide between theoretical policy frameworks and field-level execution.

2.1 International Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange

Rural poverty is a shared challenge across the Global South. AHKNCRD serves as the official national focal point and executing link for prominent international intergovernmental organizations such as:

- ***African Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO)***: The African Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), established in 1962, is an autonomous, non-political, inter-governmental body dedicated to promoting South-South cooperation in agriculture and rural development. AARDO has headquarter in New Delhi, India, the organization bridges 34 member nations across Africa and Asia to collectively combat rural poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and disease. It serves as a vital catalyst for regional growth by facilitating human resource development through international training programs, technical workshops, and seminars.
- ***Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)***: The Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) is a regional, intergovernmental, and autonomous organization established in 1979 at the initiative of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh, CIRDAP operates with a core mandate to alleviate rural poverty and promote sustainable development through integrated rural development (IRD) practices. By serving as a vital network for its member countries, the institution facilitates research, action programs, policy formulation, and extensive training designed to empower rural communities. Acting as a bridge between governments, non-governmental entities, and international development agencies, CIRDAP plays a pivotal role in fostering regional cooperation, sharing scalable best practices, and driving structural transformations to improve the livelihoods of millions of rural citizens across Asia and the Pacific.

2.2 Institutional Liaison and Technical Assistance

The Centre provides technical and academic oversight to provincial Local Government Training Institutions (such as Punjab Local Govt. Academy, Government of the Punjab in Lalamusa, Sindh Civil Services and Local Government Academy, Tando Jam, and Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, Peshawar). By synchronizing training curricula and standardizing Rural Development methodologies, AHKNCRD maintains a unified quality standard for public service training across Pakistan in post 18th Amendment administrative framework in 2010.

3. Training Programmes and Structural Curricula

The core of AHKNCRD's operational impact lies in its **Annual Training Plan (ATP) as per each financial year (July-June)**. The structured curricula are revised annually through consultations with public sector experts, academia, and international development agencies to address emerging global trends. The training initiatives are categorized into four major thematic domains.

3.1 Project Planning, Management, and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

A major challenge in Pakistan's public sector development is the inefficient planning and utilization of resources within the **Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP)** at federal level and provincial **Annual Development Programmes (ADPs)**. AHKNCRD addresses the challenges through dedicated training programmes such as:

- **Project Proposal Writing:** The Project Proposal Writing training is an intensive, practical program designed to equip professionals with the essential skills needed to transform impactful ideas into winning funding proposals. Participants dive deep into the entire proposal lifecycle, mastering how to conduct thorough needs assessments, define measurable objectives, and construct logical frameworks (Log Frames).
- **Project Planning and Management:** Building capacity to identify economic, environmental, and structural risks before project capital is deployed.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Projects:** Moving away from simple financial tracking toward measuring evaluating the actual socioeconomic impact of development projects on target rural populations.
- **Report Writing Skills:** The Report Writing Skills training program is a practical, career-enhancing workshop designed to transform complex data and day-to-day project activities into clear, actionable business intelligence. Participants will master the art of structured communication, learning how to move away from dense, conversational prose and instead draft high-impact executive summaries, precise project updates, and objective, data-driven conclusions.

3.2 Climate Change, Environmental & Concerns, Disaster Management, and Natural Resource Uplift

Given Pakistan's extreme vulnerability to climate change, AHKNCRD has integrated environmental resilience into its core curriculum. Training programmes included:

- **Disaster Risk Reduction and Management:** Preparing local government functionaries to design grassroots early warning systems and localized emergency responses for floods, droughts, and seismic programme.
- **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH):** Focus on the management of safe drinking water systems, localized drainage solutions, and ecological sanitation models adapted from the Orangi Pilot Project.
- **Sustainable Natural Resource Management:** Instructing agricultural extension workers on water conservation techniques, rainwater harvesting, and the protection of rural rangelands.
- **Environmental Concerns in Development:** The Environmental Concerns in Development training program is a crucial workshop designed to bridge the gap between infrastructural

growth and ecological sustainability. As modern development projects increasingly intersect with fragile ecosystems, this course equips project managers, engineers, and policymakers with the tools to identify, assess, and mitigate environmental risks.

- **Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation Programmes:** The Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation training program is a forward-looking course designed to equip development professionals, environmental officers, and policymakers with a dual-strategy framework for addressing global climate realities. Participants explore the critical distinctions and synergies between mitigation—reducing greenhouse gas emissions through renewable energy, sustainable land use, and energy efficiency—and adaptation

3.3 Poverty Alleviation, Financial Inclusion, and Social Safety Nets

To maximize the impact of national fiscal & socio-economic interventions, the Centre trains stake holders in the governance during training programmes being held at Centre. Key areas include:

- **Social Safety Nets for Poverty Alleviation:** Analysing and optimizing the delivery mechanisms of major welfare initiatives, such as the **Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)** and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF).
- **Micro-Enterprise and Rural Entrepreneurship:** Developing training structures for interest-free micro-loans, vocational asset creation, and financial inclusion for rural youth and women.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** The Poverty Alleviation: Challenges & Solutions training program at the Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development (AHKNCRD) in Islamabad is a flagship capacity-building initiative aimed at socioeconomic empowerment for the country's underprivileged populations. Tailored for mid-level public officials, local government representatives, and development professionals, this intensive workshop provides a deep dive into poverty identification indicators, measurement tools, and strategic methodologies.

3.4 Governance, Ethical Leadership, and Digital Administration

Efficient public delivery requires transparent administrative structures and modern tools. AHKNCRD runs regular modules on:

- **Ethical Leadership and Public Management:** Strengthening accountability, administrative ethics, and transparent asset management within local government wings.
- **Digital Transformation and E-Governance:** Training mid-level bureaucracy in digital record-keeping, data-driven citizen portal management, and geographic information systems (GIS) for rural land tracking.
- **Gender-Mainstreamed Development:** Instructing planners on integrating gender-inclusive indicators into local infrastructure and educational development budgets.

4. Key Progress, Achievements, and Quantitative Impact

Over the decades, AHKNCRD has transitioned from a basic training center into a high-output institution for capacity building. Its achievements span across quantitative human resource metrics, policy impacts, and international collaborations.

4.1 Quantitative Training Footprint

The primary indicator of AHKNCRD's institutional performance is the cumulative volume of its trained human capital.

- **Trainee Output:** Since its inception, the Centre has successfully trained over **40,000** public sector professionals, elected local councillors, non-governmental organization (NGO) officials, academia and international delegates.
- **Annual Operational Density:** The institution maintains a consistent operational tempo, executing an average of 41 to 43 extensive training programs per fiscal year. This averages roughly four to five specialized cohorts per month.
- **Financial Model:** AHKNCRD offers free trainings to all participants. The training expenses are fully absorbed by federal budgetary allocations under the Establishment Division, Government of Pakistan.

4.2 International Training Footprint and South-South Technical Exchange

AHKNCRD has reinforced Pakistan's position within international development forums by hosting high-level multilateral training programs.

Collaboration	Key Participating Countries	Core Focal Area/ Programme
AHKNCRD-CIRDAP International Training Initiative  	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam	Disaster Management & Climate Change Adaptation; building regional climate resilience framework
AARDO AHKNCRD International Training Initiative	Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Republic of China (Taiwan), Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Yemen. Burkina Faso, Egypt,	Social Safety Nets: Challenges & Opportunities; Irrigation System & Water Resource Management; Disaster

	Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia, and others	Management and Climate Change Adaptation
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These international programs help export Pakistan's successful rural development methodologies, Disaster Management and Climate Change expertise along with Water Resource Management, while importing contemporary global frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

5. Challenges, Modern Adaptations, and Strategic Outlook

As rural socio-economic landscapes evolve, AHKNCRD faces new structural realities driven by rapid demographic transitions, environmental degradation, and technological advancement.

5.1 Contemporary Structural Challenges

- **The Pace of Rural-Urban Migration:** The rapid expansion of peri-urban regions is blurring traditional distinctions between rural and urban spaces.
- Facilitation in trainings by other Member countries
- **Provincial-Federal Devolution Dynamics:** Following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, local governments and rural development has become fully devolved provincial subjects. AHKNCRD must continuously refine its mandate to serve as a cohesive federal training coordinator without overstepping provincial autonomy.

5.2 Strategic Modernization and Future Initiatives:

To maintain its institutional relevance, AHKNCRD has initiated several key strategic adjustments:

- **Hybrid and Digital Learning Infrastructures:** Building on the success of its international e-training formats with organizations like AARDO, the Centre is expanding its digital learning architecture. By launching online modules and hybrid training, AHKNCRD can reach sub-divisional officers in remote locations who cannot leave their field posts for extended periods.
- **Focus on Agrarian Digitization (Agri-Tech):** Future program cycles are increasingly integrating modern agricultural technologies. This includes training extension workers in

satellite crop monitoring, smart irrigation scheduling, and digital market pricing portals to help protect smallholder farmers from middleman exploitation.

6. Conclusion

The Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's rural human resource development architecture. By combining structured capacity building for public officials with international knowledge exchange and applied research, the Centre directly addresses the roots of rural poverty and institutional inefficiency.

As Pakistan navigates complex climate adjustments and economic restructuring, AHKNCRD's evolution—from an entry-level training wing into a specialized centre of excellence—underlines its vital role in building a resilient, self-sustaining, and empowered rural economy. Through its commitment to participatory governance and institutional excellence, the Centre continues to honour the legacy of its namesake, driving sustainable transformation across rural Pakistan.

BANGLADESH

Shaping Rural Futures Through Education: The University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

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Rural development is a foundational pillar for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide, primarily because over three-quarters of the population living in extreme poverty reside in non-urban areas, where access to essential services and resources remains severely restricted. Investing in rural spaces is critical to safeguarding global food security, as family farms supply approximately 80% of the world's food and also empower rural populations who act as frontline defenders against climate shocks (UN, 2025).

In this context, **rural development education directly accelerates the SDGs** by providing students with deep insights and the technical skills, climate literacy, and economic tools required to lift themselves out of poverty. Moreover, it directly bridges global targets with grassroots capabilities through the following critical avenues:



Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger (SDG 1 & SDG 2): Rural education programs equip people with modern agricultural training, soil preservation techniques, and post-harvest management. World Rural Development Day serves as a global catalyst to fund these training pipelines, underscoring that global food security depends entirely on the knowledge base of rural youth and family farmers (World Bank DataBank, 2024; UN, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

Gender Equality (SDG 5): Rural development focuses on gender equality. It is crucial for empowering rural women, who make up a significant portion of the agricultural workforce but often face unequal access to land and resources (UN, 2025).

Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6): Rural development focuses on clean water and sanitation that addresses the critical lack of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation infrastructure in remote and rural communities (World Bank DataBank, 2024).

Decent Work and Structural Equity (SDG 8 & SDG 10): By offering technical and vocational insights in the rural non-farm sector, including digital financial services, small-scale enterprises, clean energy, etc., rural development education diversifies household income (FAO, 2023; World Bank DataBank, 2024; UN, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

Climate Change Adaptation (SDG 13): Rural populations act as the frontline stewards of our planet's natural resources. Specialized rural training introduces communities to saline-tolerant farming, nature-

based water filtering systems, and disaster preparedness. This specialized literacy protects ecological infrastructure from climate shocks (UN, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

Life on Land (SDG 15): Rural development focuses on the sustainable management of forests, halting land degradation, and protecting biodiversity, which are the foundational assets of rural livelihoods (UN, 2025; World Bank, 2025). In these ways, rural development is directly and indirectly linked with the SDGs. Therefore, comprehensive rural development education is very important globally in achieving the global goals.

In Bangladesh, comprehensive rural development is paramount, as approximately 67.3% of the population still resides in rural areas. The agrarian countryside forms the backbone of national sustenance; despite its small geographic footprint, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) ranks Bangladesh among the top 10 global producers of 22 agricultural products, securing high rankings for primary staples such as rice, lentils, and potatoes. However, the World Bank notes that national poverty has recently risen to an estimated 21.4%, underscoring an expanding wealth gap between urban industrial sectors and rural villages (FAO, 2023; World Bank DataBank, 2024; Khalid, 2024; and World Bank, 2025).

Furthermore, Bangladesh is exceptionally climate-vulnerable, with rural areas experiencing ongoing ecological displacement due to rising sea levels and riverbank erosion. To address these vulnerabilities and fulfill Article 16 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, which mandates the elimination of urban-rural disparities in living standards, the state must actively prioritize infrastructure development. Strategic investments in the Rural Non-Farm Economy (RNFE), climate-resilient roads, and digital connectivity not only diversify household incomes through small-scale enterprises but also stem the tide of chaotic internal migration that over-saturates urban mega-hubs like Dhaka and Chittagong (Khalid, 2024; and GoB, 2021).

However, central to the success of any rural development program is a skilled team of experts to think strategically about rural development and ensure its delivery. It concerns the factors that affect rural change, how we define progress, and what can be done to achieve the overriding objective of rural development: reducing and eventually eliminating rural poverty. Therefore, students of public administration need to understand the basics of rural development so they can engage in developing rural sectors in their practical lives. To achieve this objective, the Department of Public Administration at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, offers a course in its 3rd-Year Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) program on rural development, namely “Rural Development in Bangladesh.” The main aim is to investigate various dimensions of rural development, with particular attention to the relationship between rural and non-rural domains.

The course covers conceptualizing rural development, its importance, elements, and determinants; sustainable rural development; rural development approaches; some paradigms of rural development based on modernization and dependency theories; and dilemmas in rural development. Secondly, the course tries to examine the rural economy of Bangladesh, especially its size and structure, characteristics, problems, rural poverty and poverty reduction strategies and policies in Bangladesh, and institutional, technological, and disadvantaged-focused rural development interventions in Bangladesh, with some specific examples of rural development programs, such as Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID), Comilla Model, Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), Cooperatives-Based Rural Development, Comprehensive Village Development Program (CVDP), and Small Farmers Development Program (SFDP), etc. Thirdly, the course includes agricultural development, especially agricultural research, extension, and crop production, fisheries and livestock development, rural energy, and climate change and environmental degradation. Finally, the course includes the officials and non-official pioneers of rural development in Bangladesh since the British period, partners of rural development: government and NGOs, rural development policies, followed by rural development in Korea, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, so that students may compare rural development interventions in different settings. Needless to say, the course curriculum is revised over time.

This is a very comprehensive course on rural development for the students of Public Administration at the University of Chittagong. The course is designed in such a way, so that, by the end, students may explain and critically review current debates in rural development on rural livelihoods, agriculture, and the rural non-farm economy; critically evaluate past and existing attempts to supply rural services, such as infrastructure, finance, research and extension, health and education; analyse critically alternative rural development policies in terms of their potential impact on rural poverty, equity, and economic growth; and outline and evaluate different approaches to the management of various resources and their potential impact on rural development goals.

It is worth noting that, for student evaluation, there are several in-course and summative assessments. Within the in-course assessment, there are class tests, quizzes, presentations, and assignments. The very unique, interesting, and engaging part of this course is the field attachment program, arranged each year with technical support from the Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development (BARD), Kotbari, Cumilla, Bangladesh, a well-renowned research and training academy for rural development worldwide.

In 1994, Professor Dr. Tofayel Ahmed (late), former Professor of the Department of Public Administration at the University of Chittagong, who was a renowned local government and rural development expert in Bangladesh, and a former BARD faculty member, started this program in collaboration with the BARD. Since then, each year, all students in the course are sent to the Academy for almost a week to gain practical knowledge of BARD's rural development activities. The attachment program includes both theoretical and practical exposers. With some theoretical knowledge, students are divided into several groups and assigned different topics related to rural development. The groups then finalize their research design. The groups are then sent to the local villages of Cumilla Sadar Upazila (sub-district) to collect field data.



The course instructor is addressing the inaugural session of the attachment program at the BARD



A group of students preparing for data collection



A group of students preparing for village-level field data collection

Commemorating the 2nd World Rural Development Day (6 July), 2026



A batch of 3rd year Hons is at BARD for the attachment program

The topics includes rural development issues, such as primary education, nutrition and child health, agricultural development, fisheries development, irrigation, land use pattern, use of chemical fertilizer vs bio-fertilizer, biodiversity, environmental management, green and clean energy, rural housing, women development, financial inclusion, micro finance, small and micro enterprise development, cultural development, cooperatives, local governance, youth development, social leadership, women empowerment, and NGOs, and development, etc. Students collect field data from the selected villages in groups and prepare their own reports, which are to be presented formally at the concluding session of the attachment program. They are evaluated officially by the BARD faculty members and finally by the course teacher. It accounts for 25% of the course marks.

Nonetheless, the rural development course and its topics are very familiar and popular among students in the Department of Public Administration's Master's program as well. Master's thesis students select topics related to rural development with their special interests. Many MPhil and Doctoral students have conducted and are currently conducting research on rural development issues. Since last year, the students of this course have started celebrating World Rural Development Day in the department.

We believe the educational framework on Rural development at the Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong, aligns with the theme of the World Rural Development Day, which the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) officially declares on July 6 every year. We feel proud that Bangladesh pioneered this historic global initiative, leading the UN resolution to establish the day in honour of the founding of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) on July 6, 1979, and the Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong, is serving to achieve the aim of the day.

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BANGLADESH

Redefining Community Leadership in “New Rural”: Integrating Comilla and the Saemaul Undong Frameworks

By Ranjan Kumar Guha, Former Director, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)

Abstract: *In the era of New Rural, marked by diversification of economic activities, growth of the non-farm and service sectors, and improved physical and digital connectivity, new challenges related to the digital divide, climate-related vulnerabilities, and rising inequality in rural Bangladesh require an innovative model of rural development. The article examines the evolving pattern of community leadership over time and its contextual role by analysing two recognized models of rural development, namely the Comilla model (CM) of Bangladesh and the Saemaul Undong (SU) model of South Korea. Evolved concurrently, the CM successfully drove economic transformation by modernizing and increasing productivity in the agricultural sector. In contrast, the SU began instilling an ideological base through practices of diligence, self-help, and cooperation, which led to the development of a culture of hard work and improved work ethic. Subsequently, it led to economic transformation by adopting new behaviours and technologies in different sectors of the economy. The learning of the two models suggests that the institutional framework of the CM and the social movement framework of the SU, based on its principles and complemented by performance-based support, remain valid for evolving community movements led by local leadership. The article proposes leveraging digital hubs, climate-resilient cooperatives and focusing on climate-resilient infrastructure by reengineering the existing model of CM with a positive mindset of SU. To address inclusiveness, skill training can be provided to members of resource-poor households on repairing solar panels and household appliances, producing green manure-vermicompost and tricho-compost, and improving supply chain efficiency by reducing waste. The leadership can address women in development by modernizing the daily lives of women through technological and social innovation. The new community leadership is expected to be innovative, proactive, and progressive in its mindset toward digital and climate-resilient technologies and persuade community members to adjust to the changed environment.*

1. Introduction

Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Development requires transforming the rural economy by adapting modern technologies and fostering a proactive mindset among people, while respecting existing social values and practices, and ecological balance is pertinent. This transformation requires policy support at the macro level and engagement of community members at the micro level. However, community engagement rarely happens automatically; experiences from earlier efforts show that initiatives that failed to engage the rural community suffered from flawed project design. Cultivating a culture of engagement among local people requires persuasion by a trusted, self-driven local leader with genuine concern for and dedication to the community.



By synthesizing lessons from the development efforts in Bangladesh in the 1950s, the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) developed the Comilla Model (CM) under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. This highly integrated and participatory approach addressed the development of physical, administrative, and institutional infrastructure in the sixties. Concurrently, in the early seventies, South Korea also initiated a rural development model, namely the Saemaul Undong (SU), commonly called the New Village Movement, to minimize the growing disparity between rural and urban areas and to integrate central-level and community initiatives successfully. Both models aim to engage the rural community by developing rural leadership to achieve development goals. SU eventually developed a base for development that was transmitted to the industrial revolution by developing efficiency and competitiveness.

Today, rural Bangladesh has shifted from subsistence agriculture to a diversified economy characterized by entrepreneurship, a service sector, and a shifting land-centric power structure, to a web network. Increased connectivity, access to microfinance and remittance earnings, and women's involvement in the formal labour market of garments industry have driven this change. Despite these achievements, rural areas face challenges related to the digital divide, climatic shocks, rising inequality, supply chain waste, unemployment among educated youth, and inadequate value addition initiatives.

To address these challenges, the economy requires a new development model that prioritizes inclusive growth by leveraging digital, green, and climate-resilient technologies. However, rural communities vary widely in respect of geographical vulnerability, socioeconomic status, social capital, expectations, and behaviour. Engaging communities and building their capacity to address the diverse needs of each area are prerequisites for conceptualizing a new model. Past experiences may enlighten how to engage rural communities by fostering community leadership. Based on a desk review of both the CM and SU, the article seeks to contextualize the evolving role of community leadership and strategies for engaging them by integrating experiences from the CM and SU.

2. New Rural: Shifting Social and Economic Context

New Rural is defined by a shift from a rural social and economic context centered on an Agri based economy and production to a diversified rural economy with a web of complex societal relationships. According to Rahman (2023), the traditional divide between urban and rural realities is diminishing, giving rise to an "emerging new rural." The characteristics of New Rural are as follows:

- **Diversified Economy:** Traditional agriculture is transformed through high-yield varieties, fisheries, livestock, and non-farm entrepreneurship, along with infiltration of urban lifestyle services: restaurants, beauty Parlors, and tailors, a booming service sector.
- **Improved Connectivity:** The physical and telecommunications infrastructure has changed significantly. Opportunities have emerged for optimizing input use, improving efficiency of resource use, reducing operational costs, and strengthening market linkages through integrating digitized technology.
- **New Societal relation:** Ahmed (n.d.) highlights that rural areas have evolved into a "new society" which is not isolated centres of underdevelopment, rather, rural urban continuum is the reality. Rahman (2023) found that the land-centric power structure is already diminishing, and a network-based power structure is rising. The communication and access to financial services and other services have changed production-based relation.
- **Institutional Gap:** Despite the proliferation of informal village organizations, there is a lack of effective village organizations to address the comprehensive needs of the new rural areas. The village cooperatives that evolved under the CM now suffer from a lack of innovation due to overreliance on the state and failure to develop competitive capacity to adjust in new reality (Ullah, Rahman, and Patwari, 2003). On the other hand, microfinance is often criticized for charging high service charges and for increasing the risk of debt traps. It requires a vibrant formal organization at the village level, having functional relationships with different service delivery organizations, both public and private. FAO (2014) recommended farmers' organizations with strong, member-elected leadership and robust accountability mechanisms, capable of remaining resilient in a globalized economy.

- **Challenges of New Rural:** Small farmers, who constitute 80 percent of farms, face barriers related to soil depletion, climate variability, affordable finance, and market risks. They require the adoption of modern technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), Geographical Information Systems (GIS), and e-commerce platforms, to achieve fair prices and support good agricultural practices with value addition across the agricultural subsector. However, introducing these technologies is often hindered by institutional barriers (Mujeri, M. K. 2018). Moreover, expanding the agency power of women to balance the reproductive and productive roles requires institutional innovations. The existing institutional structure and strategies need to be reengineered by utilizing lessons learned at home and abroad to contextualize in the current economy.

3. Pillar of Comilla and Saemaul Model

The CM was nurtured and developed in the social laboratory areas of the BARD. With a view to solving the structural problems of poverty and insecurity in rural society, the model seeks to address root causes such as an inappropriate administrative structure, a lack of physical infrastructure, dependence on money lenders for accessing credit, high levels of seasonal unemployment among labourers from December to May, and limited access to technology and inputs for small farmers. Four mutually exclusive yet integrated components were developed through a series of experiments, namely the Rural Works Programme (RWP), the Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP), the Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC), and the Two-Tier Cooperative (TCCA).

The Rural Works Programme emphasized the identification of physical infrastructure needs, i.e., a flood-control dam, an earthen road, and an irrigation channel, by the Union Council, the lowest level of local government. It mobilized community members to sell their labour in exchange for wheat. It successfully developed an infrastructure that facilitated agricultural transformation and created seasonal employment for labourers during the lean season. Side by side, to overcome the challenges of cultivation during the dry season, farmers were motivated to use surface water by using a low-lift pump (LLP) through the organization of a water user group and deep tube well water through cooperatives. The group and cooperative introduced joint planning for water distribution, managing and operating the capital goods of irrigation, and rural people paid fees for water usage.

All government departments were brought under a single umbrella institution called TTDC, and decentralized administration was practiced by integrating the efforts of experts at the Thana level and the wisdom of local people. Departmental officials trained cooperative leaders and model farmers by providing technical assistance and disseminating new technology and information. Subsequently, two-tier cooperatives were introduced to fill the gap in effective institutions for small farmers at the grassroots. At the village level, there was a primary cooperative society, namely the farmers' cooperative. At the sub-district level, the Thana Central Cooperative (TCCA) served as a federation of cooperatives. Eventually, the initiatives were found to be successful in developing some institutions, namely the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Upazila Complex (UC), and Bangladesh Rural Development (BRDB), for replicating them across the country. However, the development efforts have faced criticism related to elite capture of cooperatives. Experience shows that the disintegration of activities during the replication of these components by different organizations, along with huge subsidies, encouraged elite people to capture cooperative management (Khan, H. A., 1983 & Khan, A. R., 1979).

However, the Saemaul model was introduced to reduce rural-urban inequality and the psychological roots of agrarian poverty. Launched in 1970 under the leadership of President Park Chung-hee, it was a centrally controlled initiative by engaging rural people. As a core value, the program emphasized *diligence, cooperation, and self-help*. The program developed an operational definition for transforming the concept into reality by adopting specific practices. It promoted a culture of a can-do spirit by changing mindsets and practicing principles in real life. Regarding diligence, a culture of hard work was practiced by villagers who woke up early in the morning, assembled for cleaning and repairing community infrastructure by themselves. The philosophy of self-help was operationalized by arranging land for infrastructure through their own initiatives and mobilizing labour for implementing the

infrastructure of rural areas. A culture of cooperation was practiced by changing thatched roofs to tile roofs by supporting each other.

The program was implemented in three stages from 1971 to 1979, with each stage lasting three years. Stage 01 focused on developing basic local infrastructure, including widening village roads, embankments along stream beds, community centre construction, and repairing thatched roofs. Stage-2 focused on constructing advanced farm roads, mechanizing agriculture, rural electrification, and introducing telecommunications grids, along with off-season employment through the sameul factory for producing cottage products. The fourth phase focused on the nationwide dissemination of philosophy from rural to urban areas and other institutions. In the first stage, 335 bags of cement and 0.5 tons of iron rods were distributed equally to all 33,267 participating villages, followed by competitive reward injections to high-performing communities. In the second phase, inter-ministerial efforts supported villagers' initiatives with a flexible budgetary framework along with matching funds from the community's contribution. In the third phase, the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) came forward to provide a soft loan. In this way, the program gradually moved away from total government dependency through inter-ministerial budgetary support and the NACF. Thus, it tackles the criticism of its authoritarian and Top-down mobilization by engaging the private sector (Hwan Park Jin, 1998, & Kim, D. K., 2012).

4. Community Leadership Process

Defining community leadership, Dr Khan mentioned leadership is a disciplined practice of transforming a disorganized community into a self-reliant institution through *strict honesty, tireless persuasion, and a "farsighted"* refusal to compromise long-term stability for short-term comfort. This requires uncompromising in building the character, capital, and collective strength of the people. Dr. Khan prefers local selection and qualities such as a *sense of identity and responsibility to the community, trustworthiness*, rather than just traditional figures of status. The leaders should stimulate others who may be backward or slow through their own example—ensuring that development was tailored to the community's specific needs and sustained through local ownership (Khan, A. H., 1983).

As a process, cooperative members usually select one manager and one model farmer to work as a change agent in managing the cooperative and agriculture development, respectively. They were trained in weekly training organized at UCCA. The information was disseminated in the weekly meeting of the primary cooperative society. Besides these two community leaders, some more community leaders were there, like women leaders, religious leaders, functional leaders for supporting accounts keeping, and midwives for supporting during childbirth. They were trained by the initiatives of UCCA and different departments (Khan, A. H., 1983).

In the case of Saemaul, the leadership served as the "middle agent," bridging the gap between government and community. As part of the process, the village council selected one male and one female young leader in each village through a democratic process, replacing traditional local leaders with ties to politics or state machinery. After selection, they had to complete two rigorous training courses at the Saemaul Training Centre (STC). The first was a seven-day basic-level course focused on developing an ideological foundation based on the spirit of SU. The second was an 11-day rigorous, disciplined residential program focused on real-world case studies to build stamina and a strong work ethic by exposing them to initiatives from different communities. The male leaders were responsible for project preparation, financial coordination, and reforming villagers' behaviour through practice. In contrast, the female leaders were responsible for modernizing women's day-to-day life by establishing a daycare centre, promoting thrift and savings, reducing unnecessary spending on various social events, and modernizing their kitchens, etc (Kim, D. K. 2012).

In both cases, the villagers usually choose new local leaders, who then undergo a scrutiny process during training. But in the case of CM, training was regular weekly sessions that focused more on economic progress. At the same time, SU tried to focus on changing mindsets, stimulated by observing the example of others. However, in both cases, it became clear that community leadership is not an inborn characteristic of inheritance but a disciplined, institutional process for persuading people to attain the community goal.

5. Exploring Areas of Community Leadership in New Rural

For an evolving, climate-resilient green rural economy fostered by digital innovation, the institutional structure of the CM can be reformed, and competitive, performance-based support from SU can be applied. The specific areas of intervention are as follows:

- **Digital Club:** By revitalizing the TTDC concept, all existing Apps related to production and marketing can be brought under a single digital hub under the Upazila Parishad. The tech-savvy local young people concerned about society at the village level can be trained. Moreover, physical attendance at weekly meetings and regular training can be replaced by developing a digital platform. The Saemaul principles, performance-based support for capital goods of the Digital Club, can be introduced.
- **Climate Resilient Cooperative:** By organizing young farmers at the village level to introduce climate-resilient varieties, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), monitor local weather, and provide information to farmers by using and analysing real-time data through IoT-based smart irrigation and disease detection, can be promoted. Moreover, an Integrated Farm System that combines livestock, fisheries, and crops, using waste from one sector in another, can be integrated for introducing the circular economy, optimizing resource efficiency and diversifying income streams. The cooperation philosophy of CM and SU is vital for interaction with different sector farmers.
- **Climate-resilient infrastructure;** Rural Works program can be renovated with climate-resilient infrastructure, establishing solar irrigation, canal digging, and waste management plants for a circular economy through reduction, reuse, and recycling. The government may provide support through capital investment in technology by following the SU performance-based support.
- **Inclusiveness:** To ensure inclusiveness, resource-poor families can be trained in repairing climate-resilient technology, household appliances, supporting vermicomposting, tricho compost and waste management. The diligence and Self-help concepts of SU and TTDC concept of CM, along with the value addition centre following the Saemaul Factory concept for value addition of primary products under women leadership, can be promoted through cooperative leadership.

Conclusion

The new rural context requires integrating support of government, the private sector and community initiatives to align the changed rural economy. The experiences of CM and SU suggest that social and economic transformation of rural areas can be optimized by persuading community members, with local leadership having a development mentality and concern for the community. In the new environment, reengineering the institutional frameworks of the CM to address climate challenges and inequality requires integrating digital technology with the community's innovation. The principles of the SU for developing a strong work ethic and hard work can add value to community leadership. Additionally, the Saemaul learning to change policy, according to changing circumstances and performance-based support, may help develop the efficiency of resource usage. Local Community leadership with skilled, innovative, proactive, and assertive traits, and a strong network of different stakeholders, may persuade people properly. This will ultimately foster grassroots action and the achievement of sustainable development.

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INDIA

Use of IT in Faster and Cost-Efficient Sharing of Knowledge on Rural Development

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Introduction

The current document is an overview of the software developed for bulk dissemination of Information on Rural Development for CIRDAP which is an implemented solution to automate the regular knowledge sharing of CIRDAP's publications on rural development to member countries and experts worldwide through e-mail. The software is in operation since November 2024 and is found to be very helpful by CIRDAP in achieving its objective.

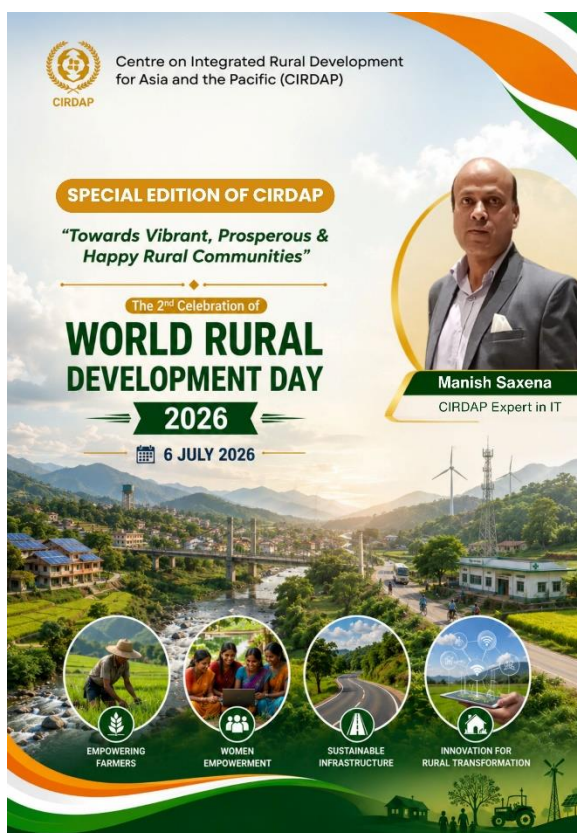
Project Brief

One of mandate of CIRDAP is to serve as a clearing house and data bank for information on IRD in the region and promote the dissemination of information through publications to its 15 member countries. His Excellency Dr. P Chandra Shekera ever since he took over the charge of Director General of CIRDAP in September 2024 has been focusing on awareness and faster knowledge sharing for inclusive, sustainable and rapid rural development across all the member countries and globally. Soon on joining the office, he initiated the monthly newsletter – 'Voice of CARDAP' which is circulated to about 120,000 experts, member countries and globally every month through e-mail. Other than the monthly newsletters there are publications like Rural Development Reports and many other publications which are shared by CIRDAP.

These multiple publications along with the attachments were sent manually through e-mail to about 120,000 recipients every month. The entire process was extremely manpower and time intensive. The process to manually send monthly newsletters to entire 130,000 recipients was a challenge to complete within month due to intensive involvement of manpower resources and time.

In October 2024, 2024, His Excellency Dr. P Chandra Shekera, Director General of CIRDAP envisaged to automate the process of sending bulk email by use of Information Technology. Mr. Manish Saxena, the then Senior Consultant IT at Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India was consulted who has successfully led the development and implementation of large IT platforms of various flagship schemes of Government of India. Subsequently meetings were organized under the chairmanship of DG, CIRDAP on the problem statement, challenges, detailed requirement, solution and the budget constraints. A quick solution was designed, developed, deployed and implemented in November 2024 within a month time by Manish Saxena. e-mail list of 120,000 recipients was sanitized and restructured, and training was also provided to CIRDAP officer on operation and support.

The software is very easy to use, highly user friendly, secure which can send e-mail to any number of recipients with just one mouse click. However, the e-mail service provider of CIRDAP i.e. Google has a limitation. Hence the software was modified to smartly mitigate the limitation to send daily email to



maximum recipients without incurring any additional cost to CIRDAP in engaging any new email service provider.

The software has caused enormous saving in manpower and time to CIRDAP. The software is much faster and sends bulk e-mail in fraction of time as compared to manually sending e-mails. The solution and other related services are provided free of cost to CIRDAP in interest of rural communities across all the member countries of CIRDAP and other part of the world. Software developed in open source to avoid licencing fees to CIRDAP for any base software. Manish Saxena is providing his services free of charges for any maintenance, support and enhancement to the software.

On an average approx. 200,000 emails are being sent every month. Approximate 3 million e-mails have been sent globally till date since its implementation in November 2024 through this software to disseminate the information on Rural Development.

The software is found to be very useful by CIRDAP officers. The key user of the software in CIRDAP are Dr. Usharani Boruah, Librarian and Ms. Hurain Jannat, Communication Officer. The efforts of Manish Saxena in providing the solution to CIRDAP has been highly appreciated by His Excellency Dr. P Chandra Shekera, Director General of CIRDAP.

About IT Expert

Manish Saxena holds master's degree in computer application (MCA) in 1995 and has over 31 years of international experience in development and implementation of various IT Applications in the domain of Agriculture, Rural Development, Finance, Banking, Retail, Logistics, Supply chain, Warehousing in both Corporate and Government sector. Since year 2014, he worked in lead role as Senior Consultant (IT) with Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and other allied ministries of Government of India and also with National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development. He has led the development of multiple IT Applications for implementation of various schemes of Government of India across the country benefitting over 140 million farmers families of the country implementing the schemes budgeted to be of over Rs 5 Lakh Crores (USD 65 Billion). Manish has technical lead the development and implementation of the National Agriculture Market (eNAM) portal of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India. eNAM is the largest digital trading platform of India for agri commodities which integrates over 1500 regulated wholesale markets (Agriculture Produce Market Committee) and facilitates over 60% trade across regulated markets in India. eNAM was launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in April 2016. Manish has also lead development of portal for Market Research and Information Network which reports and disseminate price and arrival information of all agri commodities across all (4000+) wholesale regulated markets of India.

Manish has also lead development many other portal for Funding Agri Infrastructure (AIF), Plant Protection, Plant Quarantine, Agri Extension, Farm Mechanization, Agri Investment, Natural Farming etc. and has played lead role in various other IT initiatives like Digital Agriculture, Farmers Database, Data Governance Quality Index, Convergence of schemes, PM KISAN, Soil Health Card, Fertilizer Supply Chain, National Rural Livelihood Mission (Ministry of Rural Development) etc. He has played key role in writing many proposals including National Farmer Database. Manish has been actively involved coordination between various ministries, state government. He was member of various committees of the Ministry. He was attached with high level committee setup by the Supreme Court of India on the Farm Laws for liberating agriculture marketing. His efforts is appreciated by many senior bureaucrats and office of Hon'ble Minister and by Supreme Court Committee for his skills, quality and rapid delivery and integrity. Prior to this, Manish has worked with large organization in Australia for 15 years in food supply chain from prom procurement, logistics, warehousing, retail. He has also led the development of Financial and Banking Applications and has worked for NABARD, India, for Solace Technologies (Australia) and for TMB Bank, Thailand. Manish is privileged of being associated as Expert for Centre on Integrated Rural Development in Asia Pacific (CIRDAP). He has also designed and developed software for CIRDAP which has resulted in high efficiencies in knowledge sharing since last 1.5 year since its deployment. Manish would like to convey special thanks to HE Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, Director General, CIRDAP for his continuous motivation, support, guidance and advice.

INDIA

AGCASS: A Community-Driven Model for Sustainable Rural Development and Climate-Resilient Agriculture in India

By Dr. R. Udaya Kumar, Ph.D. Vice President, Agricultural Graduates Consultancy and Service Society (AGCASS) Erode, Tamil Nadu, India.

Introduction

Agriculture remains the primary livelihood source for millions of rural families across developing countries. The Agricultural Graduates Consultancy and Service Society (AGCASS), established in 1997 in Erode, Tamil Nadu, India, demonstrates how scientific agriculture, environmental, stewardship, and community participation can transform rural livelihoods.

In an era defined by fluctuating climatic conditions, resource scarcity, and evolving market demands, traditional agricultural paradigms must undergo systemic structural changes to remain viable. The transition from legacy farming methodologies to scientifically robust, sustainable enterprises require a deliberate integration of expert knowledge and grassroots engagement. The AGCASS was founded precisely to fill this critical gap by bridging formal



agronomic science and field-level implementation. It operates as a highly specialized collaborative body, comprising over 350 agricultural and horticultural graduates. The membership encompasses a diverse spectrum of domain experts, including active agricultural consultants, retired administrative officers, university professors, banking specialists, and progressive agritech entrepreneurs. This multifaceted talent pool enables the society to deliver interdisciplinary solutions to complex agricultural problems.

Vision and Mission

AGCASS envisions economically stable, self-reliant, and sustainable rural communities through climate-resilient agriculture. Its mission is to deploy agricultural graduates directly to villages, providing affordable technical guidance, promoting location-specific technologies, conserving biodiversity, and creating livelihood opportunities.

Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration

Environmental degradation and acute drought cycles heavily affect agrarian outputs. To combat this in the drought-prone Kangayam Tract of the Erode District, AGCASS executed a milestone initiative funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme. The project restored indigenous fodder species, particularly *Cenchrus*

ciliaris, established village fodder seed banks, and improved ecological resilience while strengthening livestock-based livelihoods.

- **Fodder Conservation:** The initiative launched targeted strategies centered around the "Conservation of Indigenous Fodder Species" to establish environmental safety nets during prolonged dry spells.
- **Ecosystem Rejuvenation:** The program rejuvenated hundreds of hectares of public community plots and private farmlands by reintroducing highly resilient, traditional native fodder grass variants, notably *Cenchrus ciliaris*. Furthermore, localized fodder seed banks were successfully set up under the management of local Village Panchayats, securing future seed sovereignty.
- **Biodiversity Frameworks:** Parallel to ecosystem restoration, a comprehensive project on "Biodiversity and Bioresources for Environmental Safety" was successfully put into practice with direct financial support from the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA).

Contract Farming for Farmer Prosperity

AGCASS introduced contract farming in maize cultivation in collaboration with the State Bank of India. Beginning with 500 hectares and expanding to nearly 6,000 hectares, the initiative improved access to finance, technology, and markets, enhancing farm income and reducing production risks.

Biodiversity for Environmental Safety

Supported by the National Biodiversity Authority, AGCASS implemented a project on "Biodiversity and Bioresources for Environmental Safety." The initiative promoted conservation of local biological resources and increased community awareness regarding sustainable environmental management.

Farm Schools and Knowledge Transfer

With support from the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), AGCASS organized season-long Farm Schools that trained farmers in pest identification, crop management, and Integrated Pest Management. These practical learning platforms improved decision-making and reduced dependence on excessive chemical inputs.



Participatory Rural Development

AGCASS regularly conducts Participatory Problem Analysis Meetings involving farmers, government departments, and NGOs. These forums help identify local challenges and develop collaborative solutions related to agriculture, livelihoods, natural resource management, and rural welfare.

Capacity Building through DAESI

As a Nodal Training Institute of MANAGE, Government of India, AGCASS conducts the Diploma in Agricultural Extension Services for Input Dealers (DAESI). The organization has successfully completed nine academic batches, strengthening the quality of advisory services available to farming communities. Here, AGCASS conducts the intensive, one-year Diploma in Agricultural Extension Services for Input Dealers (DAESI). This qualification transforms conventional business owners into certified Para-Agricultural Extension Personnel capable of recommending scientific, well-balanced doses of fertilizers and targeted pesticides. AGCASS has successfully graduated 9 academic batches to date, bringing 360 skilled extension specialists directly into rural communities.



Future Directions

AGCASS plans to recognize outstanding organic farmers and rural entrepreneurs, expand agro-based self-employment training, strengthen cyber extension services, and promote climate-smart agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and rural entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The AGCASS experience demonstrates that sustainable rural development can be achieved by integrating scientific expertise, community participation, environmental conservation, and farmer empowerment. Its model offers valuable lessons for rural development initiatives worldwide.

INDIA

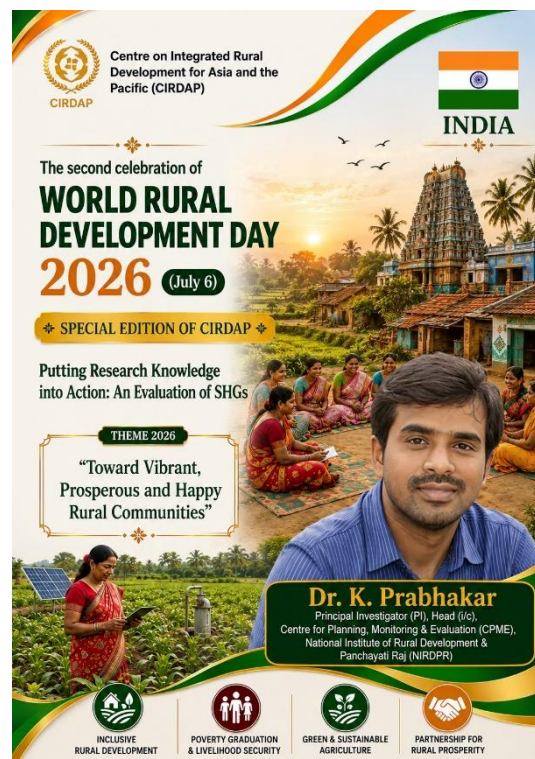
Putting Research Knowledge into Action: An Evaluation of SHGs Credit Utilization and Cash Flows of the SHG members - Andhra Pradesh State Women welfare Programme

By Dr.K.Prabhakar, Principal Investigator (PI), Head (i/c), Centre for Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (CPME), National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR)

The growth of SHG bank-linkage in the state of Andhra Pradesh is phenomenal. AP state stood in first position in the country with 30% of National share with 99.83% recovery under SHG Bank Linkage programme with yearly bank linkage disbursement of around Rs.35,000 Crores in both Rural and urban areas.

Since 2019-20 to 2023-24, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has spent Rs. 1,58,761.45 crores (on average every year Rs.31,752 crores) by covering on an average more than 6 lakhs SHGs every year SHG Bank Linkage programme to improve the self-sustainable livelihood options at rural and urban areas of the state.

The study assessed and evaluated the entire programme implementation process of ‘SHG credit Utilization and Cash Flows of the SHG members’ in



Methodology & Sample Size: Study covered 1488 sample size at different categories. The study covered 1208 individual SHG members and 122 SHGs (Groups responses) from the selected six districts using simple systematic random sampling method. The study also covered 158 officials (covering 25 officials from each selected district including banking officials).

the state of Andhra Pradesh considering real time experiences of the stakeholders like SHGs groups, individual beneficiaries, department and banking officials to cover the following *key study objectives* are:

- To review the complete implementation process of ‘SHG credit Utilization and Cash Flows to the SHGs in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
- Obtaining SHG Groups feedback on access, process, usage, leakages, outputs, successfulness, extent of improved livelihood options and their satisfaction of ‘SHGs’ credit Utilization and Cash Flows
- Obtaining Individual beneficiaries feedback about ‘SHG credit Utilization and Cash Flows’ in terms of on access, process, usage, leakages, outputs, successfulness, extent of improved livelihood options and satisfaction
- To provide policy recommendations on ‘SHG credit Utilization and Cash Flows’ based on stakeholders’ responses
- To suggest measures to improve the initiatives in the direction of achieving the goal of ‘SHG credit Utilization and Cash Flows’

Major Findings:

Increased income & Expenditure trend among the SHGs: Almost more than three forth (75.90%) of SHG members annual income is above two lakhs which is a good sign of increased income levels of SHG members because of active SHG income generation activities of the members. On an average each SHG beneficiary’s family is spending Rs. 10,000 every month towards their household expenses,

this also indicates an increased expenditure pattern on family needs by the SHG members for the same income generated through SHG activities.

Improved individual savings by the group members: On an average, each member is saving Rs. 100/- monthly with the group. It's a progressive positive sign of saving pattern by the SHG members from Rs.30/- to 200/- Rs per month.

Increased financial management capabilities of the SHGs: Half of the Self-help groups has taken credit loan worth of 6-10 lakhs, 20.4.% has taken 11-15 lakhs worth credit loans and almost 12% of groups has taken 20 lakhs worth credit loans, which resembles the increased /strengthened financial capacity of SHG members' activities and also implies timely repayment capacity of credit loan based on return on investment on their entrepreneurship.

Return on Investment: On an average, Rs.90,000/- spent on establishment as an investment. Out of this, total monthly income generated is Rs. 9000/-, in which, getting net earnings/profit is Rs.5000/-, with this amount members can repay monthly loan timely.

Low awareness loan repayment and Rate of Interest: On an average, more than 80% of the SHG members are not aware about the rate of interest charged by the banks, which needs to be addressed immediately by the bankers by mandatory explaining to every SHG member about interest rates against credit loans.

SHGs loans in support of Tenant farmers: More than two third of the SHG members (68.9%) reported that they are using SHG loan amount to utilise 'agriculture tenant purpose and 94% reported that SHG loan amount is more helpful to tenant farmers.

Low access to savings of SHGs: Only one third of groups (33.6%) are able take loans from their SHG savings. This needs to be avoided, need to regulate and allowed to take loans from SHG's savings.

Availing state government welfare schemes benefits: Almost all (99.6%) beneficiaries reported that their family is availed and benefitted from different state government welfare programmes, and more than half of the SHGs members are using these amounts for timely repay of SHG banking loans.

Improved changes in lifestyle after joining the SHG: All interviewed SHG members (100%) opined that there is improvement in socio economic status after joining the SHG. The key observed positive socio-economic status changes are self-confidence (95%), Self-respect (63.4%), recognition (17.9%), mobility (17.9%), increased family income (10.6%) and skill (3.6%) etc.

Department Support to officials: All interviewed officials reported that they have provided with the necessary infrastructure and have enough employees to perform the functions assigned to them for effective implementation of SHG banking linkages at all levels.

Incentives to be charged from bankers: 60% officials are accepted to propose to charge some percentage (between 5 to 8 percent) of financial incentives to SERP for their support, trust, monitoring, and safeguard of 99.83% of loan recovery (without any collateral) from bankers. Same, one fourth of the bankers (26.7%) are also agreed that this can be done with proper approval of regional or head officers of the respective bank's competent authorities.

No prevalence of Micro finances' (Fin Cap) institutions: All most all SHGs beneficiaries, SHGs and officials reported that all most all the SHG beneficiaries availed any financial loans from 'Micro finances' (Fin Cap) institutions neither for SHGs activities nor to repay the monthly instalments.

Cent percent overall complete satisfaction: Overall, no member had any major issues with regard to SHG credit utilization and cash flow, all the interviewed individual beneficiaries and groups showed their complete satisfaction (100%) across the districts and state as whole.

Policy Inferences:

With all the stakeholders' consultations, study findings witnessed that SHG credit linkages and cash flow programme is reaching as per the designed objectives especially getting out from poverty by the poor women, made changes in their lives and lifestyles with successfulness of the SHGs movement in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Finally, based on findings, recommending few additional inputs for further betterment and effective reach out of the programme as follows

- ☞ Need to organise and plan regular & timely monitoring and capacity building trainings to SHGs for further sensitise the knowledge of SHGs objective, loan taking process, interest rate charged by the banks, establishing the units as per HLP plan, working as team etc.
- ☞ Need to bring out a new mandatory policy decision that the bankers must bring to notice of SHGs about 'Applicable or Chargeable' and 'Rate of Interest charged' to SHGs at the time of issuing and closing time of the credit loans through oral and written communications without fail.
- ☞ Need to make sure of SHGs entrepreneurship/business needs to support by good marketing and additional credit linkage facilities, which is lacking at ground level.
- ☞ Need to give proper directions and regulations to the banks in allowing SHGs to avail internal loans from their own savings amount on priority basis
- ☞ Additional processing charges by banks on credit loans needs to be streamlined.



SAARC

From Climate Challenges to Smart Solutions: Scaling Climate-Smart Agriculture across South Asia

SAARC Agriculture Centre

Consortium for Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture in South Asia (C-SUCSeS) Project

SAARC Agriculture Centre implemented IFAD & SAARC Development Fund (SDF) co-funded project in 2022-2025 in SAARC member countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Project goal was to promote sustainable and resilient agricultural intensification in South Asia through enhanced capacity to scale up climate-smart strategies and technologies.

Key Components

1. Scaling up of Technically Viable and Gender-Sensitive CSA Technologies for Smallholders

It comprises an initial assessment of Climate Smart Agriculture Technologies (CSA) by developing an inventory of CSA technologies, identifying the high-ranking CSA technologies through process of validation by conducting participatory Research (PR), benefit-cost analysis, impact assessment, and developing strategic solutions to challenges for scaling up CSA technologies.

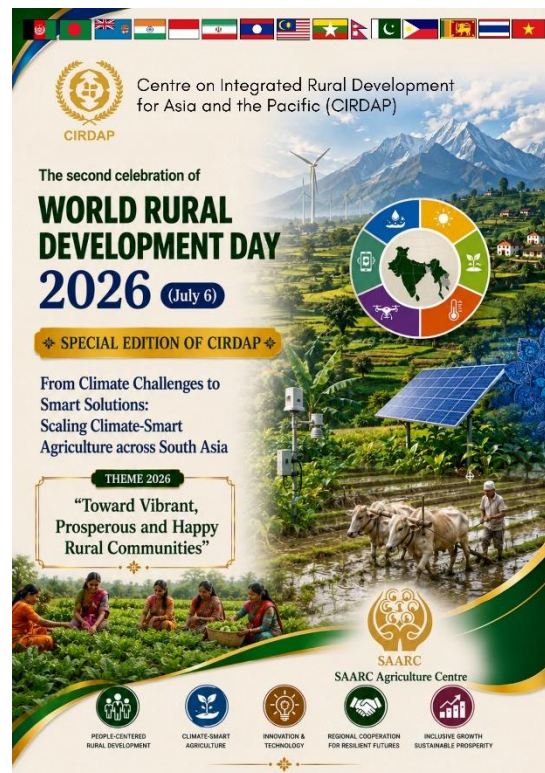
2. Policy Analysis/Advocacy and Institutional Development

Inadequate policy support and weak institutions are undermining the adoption of CSA technologies. To analyse

the hurdles and suggest solutions, a set of papers outlining policy and institutional constraints to scaling up selected CSA technologies have been produced. The exercise aimed at developing a regional strategy and program to support scaling up CSA technologies.

3. Knowledge Management and Capacity Building

Provision of sound, in-time information and knowledge to all stakeholders play a significant role in adaptation of technology. In this context, a rich repository was developed having a potential role in the promotion, popularization and adoption of CSA technologies in SAARC member countries. Four output are (i) Establishment of a well-functioning community of practice (CoP) (<https://cop.sac.org.bd/>) on CSA comprising researchers, entrepreneurs, farmer organizations, donors, and policymakers; developed training materials on CSA technologies and practices (ii) Development of training materials on CSA technologies for farmers, researchers, policy makers and entrepreneurs (iii) Enhanced knowledge and learning of farmers, researchers, service providers, and extension agents on CSA technologies, and (iv) Innovative knowledge sharing approaches and pilot tested with CSA community of practice.



Success Stories

World Bank Technology Index: adaptation, resilience and mitigation have been used to priorities CSA technologies. Prioritized climate technologies were validated across South Asia through participatory research trials (Table 1), the synergetic impacts of participatory research-based interventions are listed (Table 2 Figure 1).

Table 1: CSA technologies under participatory research trials in South Asia

Technology	Crop	Country (s)
A. Climate resilient crop varieties		
1. Drought tolerant	Pigeon Pea, Setaria, Red gram	India
2. Heat tolerant	Wheat (PBW 826)	Pakistan
3. Submergence tolerant	Rice (Ranjit Sub-1)	India
4. High yielding oilseeds	Toria	India
B. Climate resilient soil & crop management		
5. Direct Seeded Rice (DSR)	Rice	India, Nepal, Pakistan
6. Strip planting (SP)	Maize, Mustard, Lentil, potato	Bangladesh
7. Staggered planting	Rice	India
8. Relay cropping	Rice + Lentil / Pea	Bangladesh
9. Intercropping	Maize + Vegetables	Bangladesh
	Red gram + Seteria	India
	Maize + Soybean	Nepal
10. Foliar spray of fertilizers	Wheat	India
11. Bench terracing (hills)	Hedgerow plantation, Orchard	Bhutan
C. Climate resilient irrigation & water management		
12. AWD	Rice	Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan
13. Solar powered irrigation	Rice, maize, vegetable	Sri Lanka
14. Micro-irrigation	Vegetables	Sri Lanka
15. Check dams	Orchard	Bhutan
16. Drip irrigation	Vegetables, Cereals	Bhutan, Nepal
D. Climate resilient farm mechanization		
17. Raised bed planting (Bed planting)	Lentil, Mustard, Wheat, Maize	Bangladesh
18. Zero tillage	Wheat	Nepal, Pakistan

	Garlic and potato using mulch	Bangladesh
19. Seeding with improved seeder (Super seeder, Surface seeder, Happy seeder)	Wheat	India, Pakistan
20. Protected house	Vegetables, Chili	Bhutan, Sri Lanka

Table 2: Synergetic impacts of Participatory Research based activities among productivity, adaptation and mitigation

CSA Practices	Productivity Impacts	Climate adaptation & Resilience	GHG Mitigation	Countries
Use of drought, heat & submergence tolerant variety of crops	Increased crop yield due to use of stress tolerant varieties	Increased resilience to climate change effects	Increased soil carbon storage	India, Pakistan
Relay and intercropping	Increased system yields due to the addition of a second crop	Improved soil N fertility if legume crops are added in sequence	Increased soil carbon sequestration	Bangladesh, India, Nepal
Bed planting	Increased economic crop yield	Reduces waterlogging stress, facilitates mechanical weeding and harvesting	Enhances soil carbon storage	Bangladesh
Zero tillage (wheat, garlic)	Increased economic crop yield	Increased water-holding capacity of soil	Enhances soil carbon storage	Nepal, Pakistan
Strip planting	Increased economic crop yield	Reduced labor, fuel and irrigation water use	Increased soil carbon stock and reduced GHG emissions	Bangladesh
Dry Seeded Rice (DSR)	Increased economic yield of rice	Increased water saving, fuel and labor-saving resilience to climate change	Increased soil carbon stock and reduced GHG emissions	India, Nepal
AWD in rice	Increased economic crop yield due to use of water saving technology	Increased water saving, resilience to climate change	Reduced methane and nitrous oxide emissions	Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Drip Irrigation	Increased economic crop yield due to use of water saving technology	Reduces water use, improved fertilizer use efficiency	Reduced methane and nitrous oxide emissions	Bhutan, Nepal
Protected house (Polyhouse, Glasshouse)	Production of safe food crops (vegetables)	Resilience to climate change	Reduced carbon footprint compared to open-field losses	Bhutan, Sri Lanka
Super seeder/Surface Seeder	Economic crop yield	Minimize soil disturbance	Improved soil organic carbon, reduced labor and fuel use	India, Pakistan

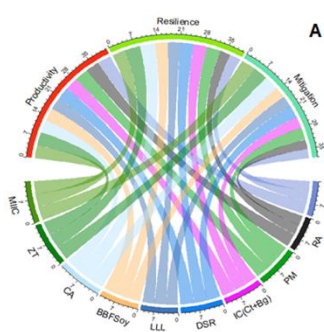


Figure 1: CSA tech. Prioritization against productivity, resilience and mitigation

- The validation of CSA technologies showed that Direct seeded rice in India, Nepal and Pakistan contributed to resource efficiency by saving 20% water, 40% labor saving and 60% energy (diesel) saving while Alternate wetting and drying contribute to climate resilience by reducing Methane emission by 48%, and water saving by ~30% in Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Intercropping, mixed cropping in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan contribute to system level benefits by better utilization of resources, improve moisture conservation, N₂ fixation by legume (20 -25 kg N/ha) and weed control. Zero tillage resulted in enhanced organic matter contents.
- Raised bed technology resulted in productivity enhancement of crops: mustard yield increased by 15%; wheat by 20%, maize by 14% and lentil by 18%.
- Protected house technology (polyhouse, glasshouse) contributed to adaptation by boosting farm income, and year-round availability of vegetables.
- Integrated farming system: crop-livestock farming resulted in diversification, resilience and productivity resulting in ~20% yield increase in India.
- High yield improved varieties contributed to profitability and efficiency by enhancing farm income @ PKR: 25000/acres and saving of water up to 30% in Pakistan.
- The scale of impacts from capacity building point of view can be assessed by involving as much as 3093 farmers in participatory research for validation of CSA technologies, around 5833 farmers including 32% women farmers have been trained in CSA technologies.
- Published 6 training manual: Orientation and Establishment of farmers' Learning Group; Climate change and the local context; introduction of CSA technologies to farmers and farms; why, where, and how to apply CSA technologies; Gender, social inclusion and adapting climate change and Sustainable Land Management.
- Synthesis reports were published to showcase comparative analysis of CSA technologies and practices in South Asia.
- The video modules were validated for the following CSA technologies: strip tillage, bed planting, zero tillage and relay cropping.

Publications and Snapshots



Figure 2: Inventory of CSA technologies in SAARC member countries



Figure 3: Participatory Research Reports of CSA technologies in SAARC member countries

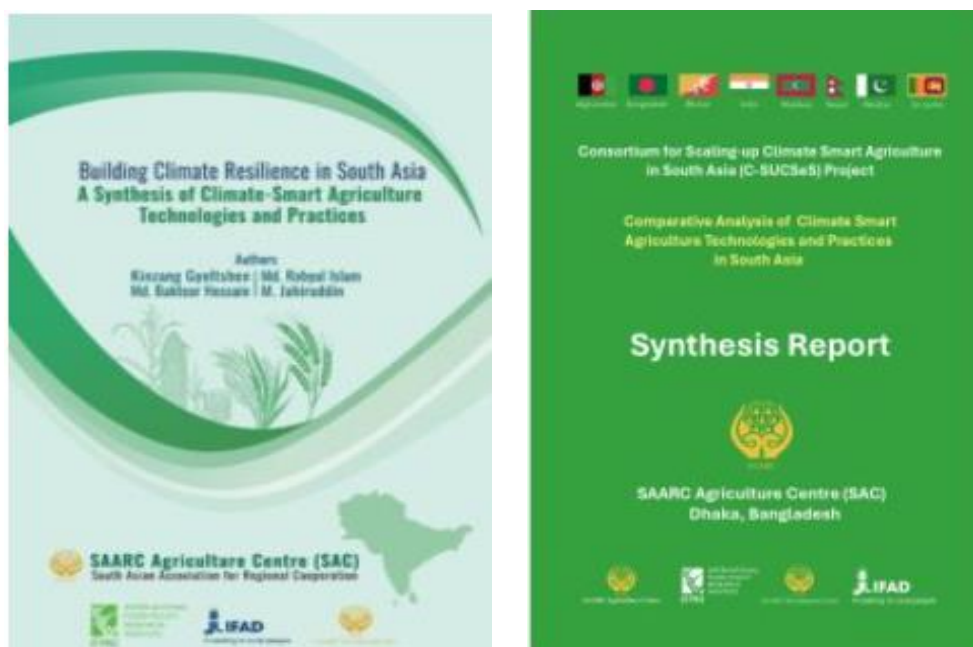


Figure 4: Synthesis Reports of CSA in SAARC technologies member counties



Zero tillage technology site, Bangladesh



Sustainable Land Management site, Bhutan



Direct seeded Rice technology site, India



Alternate Wetting and Drying site, Nepal



Improved Wheat Variety Demo. site, Pakistan



Micro-drip and Protected site, Sri Lanka

Plate 2: Photos of PR Sites in the SAARC Member Countries



Participatory Research Sites, Bangladesh



Participatory Research Sites, Pakistan



Participatory Research Sites and Farmer Field School, Sri Lanka

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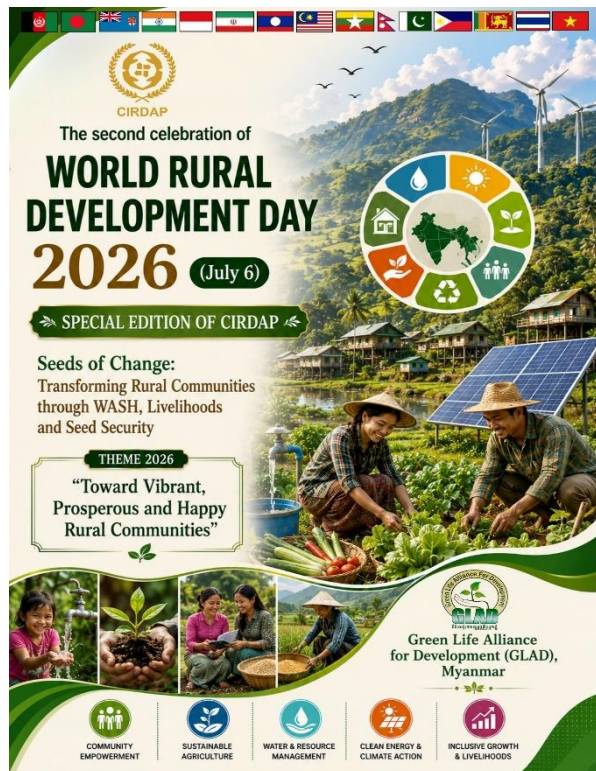
Seeds of Change: Transforming Rural Communities through WASH, Livelihoods and Seed Security

Green Life Alliance for Development (GLAD), Myanmar

1. Livelihoods Support Through Small-Scale Agriculture and Livestock for Rural Communities

Introduction

Communities living in conflict-affected areas often experience severe economic hardship due to displacement, destruction of infrastructure, loss of employment, food insecurity, and limited access to markets. In such environments, livelihood support programs play a critical role in helping families rebuild their lives and achieve self-reliance. Small-scale agriculture and livestock activities are among the most effective and sustainable livelihood strategies because they provide food, income, and economic stability for vulnerable households



Livelihood Support in rural communities



Conflict disrupts traditional livelihoods and weakens local economies. Many families lose access to farmland, farming tools, seeds, livestock, and markets. As a result, communities become increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance for survival. GLAD has livelihood support programs that help restore dignity and independence by enabling affected populations to generate income and meet their basic needs. Small-scale agriculture and livestock activities are particularly suitable because they can be implemented with limited resources and adapted to local conditions. These activities also improve food security by increasing access to nutritious food for households. Furthermore, livelihood support reduces negative coping mechanisms such as child labor, early marriage, migration, and unsafe employment practices that often emerge during humanitarian crises.

Small-Scale Agriculture Support

Small-scale agriculture provides households with opportunities to grow crops for both consumption and income generation. Agricultural support programs in conflict and natural disaster affected communities commonly include the distribution of seeds, farming tools, fertilizers, irrigation support, and technical training. Based on crucial needs of local people GLAD has trained farmers in climate-smart and sustainable agricultural practices to improve productivity and environmental protection. After the training



GLAD has supported trainees with a small amount of initial investment for kitchen gardening and home-based farming initiatives which are especially valuable for displaced families and women-headed households because they require limited land and resources. The outcome is that agricultural activities also strengthen community resilience by promoting local food production and reducing dependency on external aid.

Livestock Support and Its Benefits

Many local farmers who live in project target communities are fond of rearing domestic animals and GLAD has assessed their needs and gaps to uplift their income generation activities through small amounts of initial investments for target local communities as livestock farming is another essential livelihood strategy in conflict-affected areas. Small animals such as chickens, goats, pigs, ducks, and fish are often preferred because they are affordable, easier to manage, and reproduce quickly. These interventions improve household nutrition through access to meat, milk, and eggs while also creating opportunities for income generation through the sale of livestock products. Therefore, livestock ownership can serve as a financial asset for vulnerable families during emergencies. GLAD has provided technical assistance, agricultural inputs, training, and emergency livelihood support to affected populations while integrating cash assistance, vocational training, and market access. 701 individuals were supported for livelihood schemes in 2025 and 2026.



Conclusion



Despite ongoing challenges such as insecurity, displacement, and environmental risks, sustainable livelihood programs can significantly contribute to economic recovery and social stability. Continued investment from governments, humanitarian agencies, and development partners is necessary to strengthen community resilience and create opportunities for long-term peace and development in conflict-affected and disaster probed regions.

2. Establishment Local Seed Bank Activities in Rural Communities

Introduction

The rural communities where GLAD's project targets make their livelihoods through agriculture that is the primary source of livelihood for many rural communities. Farmers in these communities depend heavily on access to quality seeds to ensure food production, income generation, and household survival. However, challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, conflict, environmental degradation, and rising seed costs often threaten agricultural productivity and food security while supporting sustainable agriculture and strengthening community resilience.



GLAD has supported project target communities and their management committee with specific training and technical assistance to manage local seed bank which is a community-based system for collecting, preserving, storing, and distributing seeds for future planting seasons. These seed banks help farmers maintain access to traditional and locally adapted crop varieties while promoting agricultural sustainability and food security.

Preserving Indigenous and Local Seed Varieties

GLAD has formed and collaborated with local seed bank management committee to promote local seed banks which is the preservation of indigenous and traditional seed varieties. Many local crops are naturally adapted to the environmental conditions of specific regions, including drought, pests, soil conditions, and changing climate patterns. GLAD has raised awareness and trained target community groups about the dangers of modern commercial farming that often encourages the use of hybrid seeds, which can gradually replace traditional varieties. As a result, valuable local genetic resources may disappear over time. Therefore, local seed banks help protect biodiversity by conserving traditional seeds and ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from them. The preservation of indigenous seeds also helps maintain cultural heritage and traditional farming knowledge within rural communities.



Strengthening Food Security

Through initial support of financial investment and seed bank networks of GLAD for local seed banks contribute significantly to food security by ensuring that farmers have reliable access to seeds during planting seasons. In rural communities, farmers may face difficulties obtaining seeds due to high market prices, transportation challenges, or crop failures caused by disasters and climate shocks. By storing seeds locally, communities can reduce dependence on external suppliers and improve self-sufficiency. Farmers can quickly access seeds after floods, droughts, conflicts, or other emergencies, allowing agricultural activities to resume more rapidly. Reliable seed availability increases crop production and household food supplies, helping reduce hunger and malnutrition in vulnerable communities.

Supporting Climate Resilience and Sustainable Agriculture

Climate change has created increasing uncertainty for rural farmers through irregular rainfall, rising temperatures, droughts, and pest outbreaks. Local seed banks support climate resilience by promoting the use of diverse and climate-adapted crop varieties. Diverse seed systems reduce the risk of total crop failure because different varieties respond differently to environmental stress. Farmers can select seeds that are more resistant to drought, floods, diseases, or poor soil conditions. In addition, local seed banks encourage sustainable agricultural practices such as organic farming, crop diversification, and reduced dependence on expensive chemical inputs. These practices help protect soil fertility, water resources, and environmental health.

Economic Benefits for Rural Communities

Local seed banks can reduce production costs for smallholder farmers by decreasing the need to purchase commercial seeds every planting season. Farmers can save, exchange, and share seeds within the community, which strengthens local cooperation and mutual support systems. Improved agricultural productivity also increases household income opportunities. Surplus crops and seeds may be sold in local markets, contributing to economic development and poverty reduction in rural areas. Women farmers, who play a significant role in seed preservation and household food production, particularly benefit from community seed bank activities. Participation in seed management activities can strengthen women's economic empowerment and decision-making roles within communities.



Enhancing Community Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

Local seed banks promote collective action and community participation. Farmers work together to collect, store, test, and distribute seeds while sharing agricultural knowledge and experiences. These activities strengthen social cohesion and encourage cooperation among community members. Training programs associated with seed banks often improve farmers' skills in seed selection, storage techniques, pest management, and sustainable farming methods. Community-based management systems also help build local leadership and increase community ownership of agricultural development initiatives. In addition, GLAD has facilitated a platform for local farmers to share and exchange their experiences, knowledge and good practices on farming practices, pest control and seed bank management experiences to strengthen resource mobilization among themselves. Despite financial constraint of GLAD, it has supported community seed systems through technical assistance, farmer training, biodiversity conservation activities, and sustainable agriculture initiatives. 8 community-based seed bank groups were formed in 2025 through GLAD's initiatives.



Conclusion

Local seed bank activities are essential for promoting food security, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture in rural communities. By preserving indigenous seed varieties and ensuring reliable access to quality seeds, local seed banks help farmers strengthen their livelihoods and reduce vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks.

3. WASH Projects in Rural Communities

Introduction

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) interventions are fundamental to improving public health, human dignity, and sustainable development in rural communities. In many rural areas, limited access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and poor hygiene practices continue to contribute to the spread of waterborne diseases, malnutrition, school absenteeism, and economic hardship. Vulnerable populations, including women, children, older persons, and people with disabilities, are disproportionately affected by these challenges. Therefore,



WASH projects play a critical role in addressing these issues by improving access to clean water, promoting safe sanitation practices, and strengthening hygiene awareness at the household and community levels.

Importance of Safe Water Access

Access to safe and reliable water sources is essential for the survival and well-being of rural populations. Many rural households rely on unsafe water sources such as rivers, ponds, or unprotected wells, which expose communities to waterborne diseases including diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid, and dysentery. WASH projects support the construction and rehabilitation of water systems such as boreholes, gravity-fed water schemes, protected wells, rainwater harvesting systems, and community water storage facilities. These interventions significantly reduce health risks associated with contaminated water and improve household access to safe drinking water throughout the year while improving water access also reduces the time and physical burden associated with water collection, particularly for women and girls who are often responsible for fetching water over long distances. As a result, women and children have more time for education, income-generating activities, and household responsibilities.

Promoting Hygiene Awareness and Behavioural Change



Access to water and sanitation infrastructure alone is not sufficient without proper hygiene practices. Hygiene promotion is therefore a critical component of WASH programming. GLAD has conducted both schools and communities for hygiene promotion sessions along with hygiene kits and related items as rural communities often require awareness campaigns and training on safe hygiene behaviours such as handwashing with soap, safe water storage, menstrual hygiene management, and household sanitation practices. Community-based hygiene education helps prevent disease outbreaks and improves public health outcomes. GLAD has formed relevant groups to

sustain awareness sessions such as schools, health centres, women's groups, and community leaders play important roles in promoting sustainable behavioural change. GLAD has understood that hygiene promotion activities are especially important during emergencies and disease outbreaks when vulnerable communities face increased health risks. These interventions help reduce environmental contamination and prevent disease transmission. Healthier communities experience lower medical expenses and improved productivity, supporting overall community development and economic stability.

Supporting Education and Gender Equality

WASH projects have a strong positive impact on education in rural communities. GLAD has a project activity as cash and voucher assistance to children, especially girls who are more likely to attend and remain in school when safe drinking water, gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, and hygiene services are available. At the same time GLAD has constructed school latrines to maintain adequate toilets and menstrual hygiene facilities often contribute to school attendance among adolescent girls. By improving school WASH infrastructure, projects create safer and more inclusive learning environments. In addition, reducing the burden



of water collection allows girls and women to participate more actively in education, livelihoods, and community decision-making processes. This contributes to greater gender equality and women's empowerment.

Strengthening Community Resilience and Sustainability

GLAD has incorporated with partners/donors to strengthen Sustainable WASH interventions for the resilience of rural communities to environmental, economic, and public health challenges as climate change, droughts, floods, and water scarcity increasingly threaten rural livelihoods and water systems. GLAD has always facilitated community led initiatives by incorporating community participation, local management committees, maintenance training, and climate-resilient infrastructure improve long-term sustainability. Thus, communities that are actively involved in planning and managing WASH facilities are more likely to maintain and protect these systems over time. Integrated WASH approaches also contribute to improved nutrition, food security, and livelihood outcomes by supporting healthier living conditions and reducing vulnerability to disease.

Conclusion

GLAD is able to uplift up lives of rural communities through WASH projects which are essential for improving health, dignity, education, and resilience in rural communities. Besides, strengthening community led project activities will boost access to safe water, improved sanitation, and proper hygiene practices significantly reduce disease risks and enhance the quality of life for vulnerable populations. Through WASH interventions, GLAD can contribute to gender equality, educational access, economic development, and long-term community sustainability.



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Championing Rural Transformation: 37 Years of Leadership, Innovation and Regional Cooperation

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Connecting Development Communication, Knowledge and Impact for Transformation

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THEME 2026

**Towards Vibrant,
Prosperous and Happy
Rural Communities**



Promoting inclusive, resilient and sustainable
rural communities for a better future for all.

