



18

## GIVING BIRTH IS THE EASY PART

Ahmad Salahuddin

Like many other innovations in the area of development, Bangladesh gave birth to a new way of making learning videos.

In these rice videos, women from Maria village in Bogra, northwest Bangladesh, showed their improved practices of seed cleaning, processing and storage.

In 2002–2004 extension agents, media, project and programme implementers showed interest in using the videos when they were made available by the project (PETRRRA – Poverty Elimination through Rice Research Assistance), which I helped to manage.



Storing rice seed in a pot, with neem leaves. Similar innovations have been shared across Africa on video.

---

The insights gained from this cross-continental experience of sharing videos later contributed to the creation of [Access Agriculture](#), a global platform for sharing agricultural videos in many languages.

---

Initially, the project partners were enthusiastic about using these videos. IRRI translated them for use in other countries (India, Philippines). CABI helped to disseminate the videos in many villages of Bangladesh.

Another partner, RDA, experimented with video production on other crops and with women farmers, and also disseminated these videos with the aid of TV and print media. Policy makers in Bangladesh also thought that video had potential to be mainstreamed within the extension system.

However, it is now clear that this enthusiasm rested only with individual champions and did not spread into their wider organisations. The initial enthusiasm could have led to an effective new way of reaching many farmers with quality information, but the momentum of progress failed in Bangladesh.

Outside Bangladesh, however, the momentum did continue. The video production leader, Dr Paul Van Mele, brought the idea with him when he moved from Bangladesh to the Africa Rice Center in Benin. There,



*Bangladeshi video experiences laid the foundation for the Access Agriculture approach.*

he had the Bangladeshi seed videos translated into various African languages.

The insights gained from this cross-continental experience of sharing videos later contributed to the creation of Access Agriculture, a global platform for sharing agricultural videos in many languages.

Giving birth to global video innovation was the easy part for Bangladesh. But clearly more effort was needed to sustain the approach in this country. Institutes that were involved in the research could have developed a protocol for sharing the videos widely with farmers.

The government could have made a policy, for example, in which every scientific innovation coming from the research system would automatically have a farmer-led video attached to its fact sheets. Extension policy makers could then have transformed video into a major tool to reach thousands of farmers that cannot be reached through other means.

National media could have made use of these videos by transmitting them during appropriate seasons. In the current vacuum of lack of national strategy, videos remain under-utilised.

Many NGOs claiming to be the leading development agencies in the field of agriculture, do not consider video as a strategic tool for development. However,

agricultural projects and programmes are producing many new project-promoting videos and spending a lot of money. It is also much more expensive to make a new video than to translate one, yet many actors fail to see the value of translating videos made by others, such as the ones hosted on the Access Agriculture website.

As a project management member following the developments in Bangladesh over the last 15 years, it has been frustrating for me to see the non-actions and lack of progress in my country while the idea of farmer-to-farmer videos has gone much further across Africa.

It is time to understand why it did not work in Bangladesh and to think how potential actors could play roles to adopt a strong video-led extension approach.

The good news is that Access Agriculture has decided to work on this in Bangladesh in the coming years. I decided to join the team and to contribute to helping the birthplace of these videos make up for lost time.

**AHMAD SALAHUDDIN**

IRRI, Bangladesh

Ahmad.salahuddin48@gmail.com